

Fiction of the *New Statesman*, 1913-1939

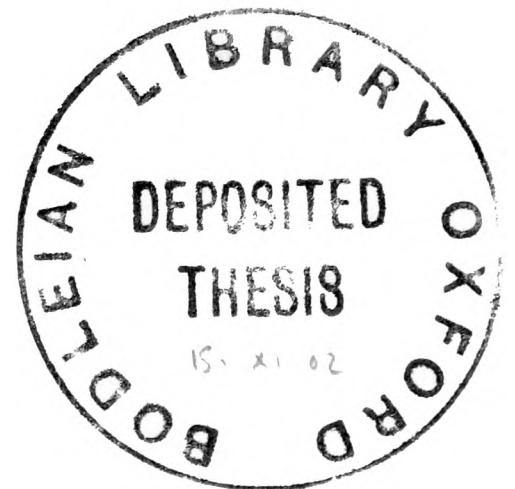
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Abstract

This thesis is the first systematic study of short stories published in the *New Statesman* [*NS*] weekly magazine from its foundation in 1913 to 1939. The main question it seeks to address is what type of fiction did a mainstream socialist publication like the *NS* publish then? By chronologically charting dominant literary figures and themes, the thesis aims to discern significant cultural tendencies and editorial principles of selection. Following Raymond Williams’ ‘cultural materialism’, fiction is read in its relation to social history, as ‘representation of history’.

Chapter 1 deals with the foundation of the journal and its first year of publication, mapping out the contradictions between Fabian collectivist ideology and ethical socialism, urban realism and literary Georgianism, country and city. A focus on urban problems of poverty, unemployment, philanthropy, and machinofacture is at the heart of the *NS*’s literary concerns in 1913. Chapter 2 focuses on stories published during World War I, and goes up to 1926. It argues that the reality of the War was falsified as a time of rest and relaxation, in line with the journal’s political policy of supporting the war effort. The immediate post-war period is read as a time of disappointment and intensified social conflict and struggle.

The General Strike of 1926 is a turning point in interwar history. It also ushers in a period of unprecedented cultural activity in the *NS*. As Chapters 4 and 5 show, the post-Strike period is characterised by the consolidation of the working-class fiction of socialist R. M. Fox; by the rise of the countryside realism of H. E. Bates; and by the rise of the colonial fiction of E. R. Morrough on Egypt (which is examined in the context of Leslie Mitchell’s, E. M. Forster’s, and William Plomer’s responses to empire). Significant contributions by women writers (such as Faith Compton Mackenzie) about travel, duty, and oppression are also made in the late 20s, early 30s. Chapter 6 is dedicated to the magnificent place that Russian fiction occupies in the 30s through the work of Michael Zoshchenko. Though written during the free and experimental 20s, his satiric fiction is published as a sample of Soviet literature of the 30s, thus consolidating the Stalinist line dictated by the political editor, Kingsley Martin, that ‘self-criticism’ is a central part of Soviet politics and society. Chapter 7 is a tribute to the *NS*’s contribution to reconstructing British realism away from both Victorian moralism and European naturalism. The stories of Bates, V. S. Pritchett, and Peter Chamberlain are dominant, conveying different ways of negotiating the pressures of documentary realism and the political developments of the 30s. Also discussed is the unique modernist contribution of neglected Stella Benson, which presents a strong challenge to the usual representationalism of *NS* fiction.

The concluding chapter reads *NS* fiction in the whole period between 1913 and 1939 as the cultural expression of the new petty bourgeoisie, especially its progressive, politically and socially engaged side. With its focus on ordinariness and lived experience, and its formal experimentation and innovation, *NS* fiction exemplifies artistic commitment *par excellence*: a conscious cultural alignment with the actuality and potentiality of the new petty bourgeoisie.

Word Count: 100,000 words

To Lana

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Chapter 1

Realities of the City, Dreams of the Country: 1913

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin by describing briefly the political and ideological motivations behind establishing the *NS*, and by introducing the editors who launched and sustained it as a successful review of politics and literature. The major part of this chapter is dedicated to examining fiction published in the *NS* in 1913. Reference to poetry will also be (exceptionally) made here in order to be able to determine more accurately and clearly the founding cultural parameters and literary concerns of the journal. In essence, there is a clear contrast in 1913 between two dominant ways of looking at the country and at the city. My main objective here is to identify these two patterns as constitutive of the cultural contradictions of 'new statesmanship' and to pinpoint their ideological determinations within Fabian socialism.

1.2 Origins

When someone starts a literary-political review which is an organised intervention in the cultural and political life of society, they must – expressly or tacitly – have a general map in their mind of the array of forces that confronts them.¹

But there seems to be a clear call to leadership in the labour and socialist movement to which we feel that we must respond. For that purpose we are starting a new weekly next spring, and the planning out of this organ of Fabianism is largely devolving on Sidney [Webb].²

The *NS* was established in 1913 in order to propagate a state socialist, collectivist social and political programme. It was founded by a group of Fabians (including George Bernard Shaw) headed by Beatrice and Sidney Webb, who sought to remedy what they saw as the inefficiency and waste of unmanaged *laissez-faire* capitalism through state administration and control (if not ownership) of the means of production. ‘It [collectivism] refers to the process by which state policy became organised around class or corporate rather than individual interests. Thus, within the collectivist perspective, the state was seen as representing particular collective interests, and thereby required to intervene positively in civil society on behalf of these, rather than holding the ring within which individual interests compete’.³ *Collectivism* would thus come to replace liberal *individualism*, in historic crisis since the 1880s – a case of thesis being overcome by anti-thesis, word by its antonym.

The agent of this force for collectivisation is an expert, scientifically trained, reformist, bureaucratic, state elite, much favoured by the Fabians. As Eric Hobsbawm has

¹ Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with the New Left Review* (London: Verso, 1981), p. 72.

² Beatrice Webb, *The Diary of Beatrice Webb: The Power to Alter Things 1905-1924*, ed. by Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, 4 vols (London: Virago, 1984), III, p. 179.

argued: 'The Webbs' entire structure of socialism pivots on such professionals. They are the trained, impartial and scientific administrators and expert advisers who have created an alternative court of appeal to profit'.⁴ In fact, the rise of Fabian socialism (and, by extension, of their organ the *NS*) can only be understood as an expression of a *new social stratum* of professionals and public administrators produced by the shift to monopoly capital from the 1880s onwards. Fabianism is seen as the politics of 'the new salaried professional, administrative, technological and intellectual cadres of post-*laissez-faire* capitalism'.⁵ It is to this social segment of society specifically that the *NS* would seek to appeal, to what Shaw in *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* described as the *third class* standing between the propertied and the propertyless.⁶

For Palme Dutt, Fabian political thought, or the 'revival of Owenism in the age of imperialism', is counter-revolutionary. By conceiving of society as struggle free and of the capitalist state as a neutral instrument of progress, it denies the role of the proletariat: 'The essence of Fabianism thus lies [...] in the denial of the role of the proletariat and of the proletarian class struggle as the line of advance to Socialism'.⁷ Fabian politics are

³ Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz, 'State and Society, 1880-1930', in *Crisis in the British State 1880-1930*, ed. by Mary Langan and Bill Schwarz (London: Hutchinson, 1985), pp. 7-32 (p. 16).

⁴ E. J. Hobsbawm, 'The Fabians Reconsidered', in *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), pp. 250-71 (p. 258). This is a major re-assessment of the place of Fabian Socialism in English radical thought. It shatters many myths about the Fabians (e.g. being the destroyers of Marxism in Britain, the inspirers of the Labour Party, the announcers of the welfare state), argues for their *a-typicality* within the English socialist and labour movements, and provides a class analysis of their social composition: 'The Fabians, alone among socialist groups, opposed the formation of an independent party of labour, supported imperialism, refused to oppose the Boer war, took no interest in the traditional international and anti-war preoccupations of the left, and their leaders took practically no part in the trade union revivals of 1889 or 1911 [...] It is difficult to find a record less in tune with that of the socialist and labour movement in the period from 1889 to 1914' (p. 253).

⁵ Hobsbawm, 'Fabians Reconsidered', p. 266. This point about Fabianism being a reflection of the political outlook of the 'new middle class' or new petty bourgeoisie was made earlier by R. Palme Dutt, the theoretician of the Communist Party of Great Britain, in his review of Fabianism in 'Notes of the Month', *Labour Monthly*, 10 (July 1928), 387-411.

⁶ See Palme Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', p. 400.

⁷ Palme Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', pp. 397-8. Interestingly, Trotsky also saw the Fabians as a counter-revolutionary force in his prophetic *Where is Britain Going?* [1926], where he argues that the Fabians are

structured around denying the proletariat a role in the transformation of their own (and society's) affairs. Social change will come from above, through constitutional and legislative means. There is therefore no need for an independent party of the working class; the Tory and Liberal parties need to be 'permeated' and persuaded to adopt collectivist and reformist policies. As John Callaghan has argued: 'Socialist politics, in practice, was reduced to activities of an elite whose energies were focused on the persuasion of the governing class'.⁸ Moreover, as Norman MacKenzie has also concluded: 'All through their lives, it seems to me, the Webbs had believed in a middle-class, quasi-scientific, technocratic or managerial form of collectivism very different from the ambiguities of social democracy, or realities of the working-class movement'.⁹

With the revival of mass political movements from 1910 onwards (suffrage, labour, and Irish agitation), and with the failure of the Webbs's Minority Report for the reform of the Poor Law, the dominant Fabian conception of politics ('permeation') was in crisis. On their return from a tour of India and the Far East in 1912, collectivism was coming under sustained attack from a group of young socialists inspired by French Syndicalism and English utopian socialism. Headed by G. D. H. Cole, the Guild Socialist revolt against collectivism was gaining growing support in the Fabian Society, especially among younger members in the Fabian Nursery and in the Fabian Societies of Cambridge and of Oxford (where Cole was a research fellow), which both came to be dominated by

'nowadays the most reactionary grouping', and, with the ILPers and the Conservative trade union bureaucrats, 'the most counter-revolutionary force in Great Britain, and possibly in the present stage of development, in the whole world': *Collected Writings and Speeches on Britain*, ed. by R. Chappell and Alan Clinton, 3 vols (London: New Park Publications, 1974), II, pp. 3-123 (p. 57).

⁸ John Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain since 1884* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 44.

⁹ Norman MacKenzie, *Socialism and Society: A New Vision of the Webb Partnership* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1978), p. 25. MacKenzie is thus not surprised that the Webbs ended up as admirers of the Soviet regime: 'it was not silliness or senility that led them to communism but

Guild Socialists. Though less revolutionary than Syndicalism, which advocated the creation of revolutionary Trade Unions – a political structure to challenge parliament and the state apparatus and seek the emancipation of workers from exploitation through the methods of boycott and sabotage culminating in the General Strike – Guild Socialists believed in industrial democracy and self-government, a workers' control of production using Trade Unions to establish an economic organisation alongside the political structures of the state. Guild socialism can thus be seen as a containment of the revolutionary potential of Syndicalism and a development of its pluralist, corporatist strain.¹⁰ Nevertheless: 'The whole emphasis is on the worker as producer, not as consumer: on workers' control, not the division of income: and on Trade Unions, and not the state, as the spearhead of advance'.¹¹ It was a way of not only bringing back the producer into politics but also of liberating workers from the slavery of the wage system.¹² Both notions were an anathema to the Fabian Old Guard, signifying the chaos of political thought on the left. As Beatrice Webb explained in a letter to Mrs Ashbee on 11 December 1912: 'But the present disorder and chaos of thought and feeling within the

their enduring conviction that an enlightened oligarchy is the best and most efficient form of government' (p. 25).

¹⁰ This argument is made by Geoffrey Foote, *The Labour Party's Political Thought: A History*, 3rd edn. (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 100-122. Foote also draws attention to W. Mellor (Cole's colleague at the National Guilds League who later joined the CPGB) and his essay 'A Critique of Guild Socialism', *Labour Monthly* (1921), 397-404, where he argues that: 'The fundamental weakness of Guild Socialism always was that it had the very vaguest idea of how it proposed to get to the beautiful goal that its theories had sketched' (p. 399); and that: 'It hovers in a state of uneasy equilibrium between the medieavalists and the revolutionaries' (p. 402).

¹¹ C. A. R. Crosland, *The Future of Socialism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), p. 50.

¹² For a detailed exposition of Guild Socialist ideas see G. D. H. Cole, *Guild Socialism Re-stated* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1920). For a sympathetic account see Anthony Wright, *G. D. H. Cole and Socialist Democracy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), and his 'Guild Socialism Revisited', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9 (January 1974), 165-80.

Progressive Movement seem to us so dangerous that we are willing both to give our work and to risk our money trying to remedy it'.¹³

Guild Socialist ideas were transmitted in England by the weekly journal the *New Age*, under the new editorship of A. R. Orage from 2 May 1907. Orage published Arthur J. Penty's anti-industrial, utopian medievalism, later collected in *The Restoration of the Gild System* (1906), arguing that Fabian collectivist reforms would not give the workers rights to determine their own wages and conditions of labour and fails to address their needs as human beings. In a series of detailed articles by S. G. Hobson in the winter of 1912-13, the *New Age* also published a more modern, anti-capitalist (rather than merely anti-industrial) version of Guild Socialism – which was the one that inspired Cole – outlining strategies for creating democratic institutions that would mediate between the various guilds and the public, thus eliminating the function of the centralist state.¹⁴

It has been claimed that had the *New Age* adopted collectivist rather than Guild Socialist notions of social change there would never have been a *NS* journal.¹⁵ The *NS* was therefore established to re-articulate the need to pursue the political aims and strategies of state socialism and collectivism and to contain the influence of Guild Socialism on the upcoming generation of Fabians.¹⁶ With the financial assistance of

¹³ *The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb: Pilgrimage 1912-1947*, ed. by Norman MacKenzie, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), III, p. 13.

¹⁴ For a brief exposition of Penty's and Hobson's ideas see Frank Matthews 'The Ladder of Becoming: A. R. Orage, A. J. Penty and the Origins of Guild Socialism in England', in *Ideology and the Labour Movement: Essays Presented to John Saville*, ed. by David E. Martin and David Rubenstein (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp. 147-166. Also relevant is Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (London: Chatto & Windus 1958; repr. London: Hogarth Press, 1982), pp. 187-90.

¹⁵ Adrian Smith, *The New Statesman: Portrait of a Political Weekly 1913-1931* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), p. 20. Smith argues that: 'There probably never would have been a *New Statesman* if its chief rival on the left in the final years of the peace had been the joyless organ of collectivist orthodoxy most likely to find favour with the 'Old Gang''. This analysis is further supported by the fact that in 1907 G. B. Shaw invested £1000 in the *New Age*, in the hope that it would adopt collectivist state socialism.

¹⁶ In order to spread this version of socialism, the Webbs wrote a series of articles entitled 'What is Socialism?' which were published in the *NS* over a span of twenty issues beginning with the first.

Shaw and other senior fellow Fabians (Edward Whitley, Henry Harben, and Ernest Simon), the *New Statesman and Co.* was set up in the winter of 1912. As Sidney Webb wrote to Élie Halévy on 18 December 1912: 'It is to be a first-class sixpenny on the lines of *The Spectator* or *The Nation*, but with its own basis of a sane and practical Collectivism'.¹⁷ Clifford Sharp, a loyal young collectivist and editor of *Crusade*, organ of the National Campaign for the Prevention of Destitution which produced the Minority Report, was appointed political editor. He was an engineer by training and founder of the Fabian Nursery in 1906.¹⁸ Beatrice Webb was later to describe him in her diary on 22 September 1917 as 'absolutely trustworthy': 'He has remained a bureaucratic collectivist: he is a conventional patriot, holding the National Guildsmen and C. O.s [Charity Organisation Society] in contempt, conservative in his heart and instincts, cold and reasonable in his methods of approach and disinterested and public spirited in the main objects of life'.¹⁹

Unlike in the political sphere, though, Fabian collectivism had no cultural agenda or programme. Collectivism meant a re-organisation of the state; culture didn't feature as an active part in this Fabian ideology. In fact, the Fabianism of the 'old guard' was premised on the rejection of culture as a sphere for social change, a point to which I will return. Even though the journal was subtitled 'A Weekly Review of Politics and Literature', the Webbs didn't have a clear idea about what the *NS*'s literary section (back

¹⁷ *Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb*, III, p. 12.

¹⁸ As Adrian Smith explains, Sharp gained his journalistic expertise on Orage's *New Age*, though he didn't subscribe to its Guild Socialist politics and left before the attack on the Webbs was consolidated: 'It is clear from Sharp's three-year tenure editing the *Crusade*, and then the successful launch of the *New Statesman*, that he learnt a great deal from Orage. The *New Age* taught Sharp all he knew about editing a political weekly and literary review. He left the magazine in 1910, and three years later he set about destroying it' (p. 37). For biographical information about Sharp see: Adrian Smith, 'Sharp, Clifford Dyce (1883-1935)', in *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, ed. by Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville, 10 vols (London: Macmillan, 1972-), VII, pp. 219-24.

half) should really be doing other than reviewing books. It was quite clear, though, that it should play a subsidiary role to economics and politics in the journal, and that it shouldn't draw too much attention to itself.²⁰ The *NS* would have to be defined by its politics not its literature.

The absence of a clearly defined founding policy for the back half effectively meant that the appointed editor would become the keystone of literary and cultural policy. It was up to the editor to define an *aesthetics of Fabian collectivism*, if such a thing was desirable or possible. The founding literary editor of the *NS* was J. C. (Jack Collings) Squire, arguably one of the most neglected literary journalists of his time. Recruited from the ranks of the Fabians, having been founder of Cambridge University Fabian Society, Squire was a poet, parodist, and regular contributor to the *New Age*. Though he proved to be 'a good collectivist' politically, as Beatrice Webb notes in her diary entry on May 1918,²¹ he always remained an enthusiastic supporter of the 'ethical socialist' tradition of Ruskin, Morris, and Carpenter, as his letter of January 1906 to his future wife Eileen Wilkinson shows: 'You positively *must* read a few elementary socialist things soon – William Morris and Ruskin to start on. You will realise that socialism is far more a moral and ethical – even artistic – movement than a political one The world's salvation is mainly coming from the women and the workmen'.²²

¹⁹ *The Diary of Beatrice Webb*, III, p. 287.

²⁰ This point was always being re-iterated by *NS* director E. D. Simon. Sidney Webb would always make the point, as in his letter to Simon on 19 May 1913, that they must be tolerant lest they alienate the younger generation: 'As to the 'literature', we must be tolerant. I find this part of the paper is greatly admired by many people, and Squire is very highly thought of. I think him very clever and a very charming fellow. But my own taste in 'literature' is apparently limited, and I don't always appreciate what he does! One has to remember that the 'new generation knocking at the door' has to be welcomed and encouraged, even if their elders don't appreciate them!' (*Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb*, III, p. 20)

²¹ *Diary of Beatrice Webb*, III, p. 288.

²² Quoted in Patrick Howarth, *Squire: Most Generous of Men* (London: Hutchinson, 1963), p. 42 [original dots].

This conception of socialism was, as Sheila Rowbotham states, ‘congenitally vague [...] it combined its vision of how the world should be with the struggle against exploitation’; it was anti-utilitarian, (predominantly) anti-industrial, and anti-civilisational, seeking to challenge and resist capitalism through a vision of comradeship, ‘a personal culture of everyday life’, and (sometimes) of a ‘non-parasitic living, simplification of life, the liberation of women and respect for animals’.²³ As Foote says: ‘It was a vision of dignity and craftsmanship, in which beauty and a community spirit replaced the grubby and self-seeking search for money which characterised the ugly, dehumanised values of competitive capitalism’.²⁴

The marked impact of ‘ethical socialism’ on Squire can be seen in a paper he read to the Plymouth branch of the Social Democratic Federation entitled ‘Socialism and Art’, which was later published with an introduction by Walter Crane – artist, Morrisite socialist, designer of frontpiece for famous *Fabian Essays* (1889), and promoter of arts-and-crafts movement.²⁵ In this little-known essay, which is worth discussing briefly, Squire sees himself as addressing a lack in the socialist tradition on questions of art and society: ‘Even the Fabian Society, that Universal Provider of propagandist tracts, has not condescended to emit as much as one meagre little pamphlet on Art’.²⁶ His pamphlet is concerned with charting the history of art and society from Athens to capitalism and asking the following two questions of each era: ‘How far is the great artistic instinct of the people given free play, and how far is the individual genius encouraged to exercise

²³ Sheila Rowbotham, ‘Edward Carpenter: Prophet of the New Life, in *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis*, by Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks (London: Pluto Press, 1977), pp. 25-138 (p. 74, p. 102, p. 67, p. 73, p. 103).

²⁴ Foote, *Labour Party's Political Thought*, p. 34.

²⁵ See entry by Margaret 'Espinasse, ‘Crane, Walter (1845-1915)’, in *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, VI.

²⁶ J. C. Squire, *Socialism and Art*, intro. by Walter Crane (London: XXth Century Press, 1908), p. 5.

Further references are given after quotations in the text.

his powers to the fullest?’ (p. 11). Following Ruskin and Morris, the Middle Ages are identified as the times most congenial for the production of art: ‘your medieval craftsman exercised his ingenuity upon everything that passed through his hands. In William Morris’s phrase: “He decorated everything, from a porridge-pot to a cathedral”. His surplus time was of no value to anyone else, so he could afford to spend it in pleasing himself [...] Thus it is that the Middle Ages were the only times in which there has been a great Popular Art’ (p. 10). Conditions today are different, Squire argues, with less leisure time, a mechanised labour process, and the changed market relations and pressures of commercialisation. ‘Then there was a rich variety: now there is a meagre uniformity’ (p. 11). Art under capitalism is: ‘ “Art be damned, if it isn’t in the contract”. Under a competitive commercial system where cheapness is the Holy Grail, almost every single thing that you can think of is bound to be a triumph of ugliness’ (p. 13). ‘Capitalism has stifled Art and tortured the artist’ (p. 15), and only a ‘Socialist State’ (the collectivist in Squire wasn’t so far away after all) will provide the appropriate conditions for the production of art and the spread of culture by freeing the artist from the capitalist market and the dictates of profit. Squire’s concluding remarks are particularly illuminating:

Men will attempt to abolish ugliness wherever possible; ugliness in social conditions of all sorts, in their dwellings, in their clothes, in their habits, in every single article they use. One can scarcely agree with Ruskin that the destruction of all machinery is desirable. But still, it is highly probable that in a communist society men, as regards certain articles of every-day use, would rather go without machinery, and do a little more work, in order to get the beauty that only handicraft can give [...] If we feed a hungry child, we are in a certain sense helping the cause of Art. If we pull down a filthy cottage and erect something habitable in its place, we are doing so no less. The ancient identities between Beauty and Good, and between Ugliness and Evil are as true now as ever they were. (p. 16)

Squire's views are predominantly based on Morris's views on art and society and conception of communism. Morris's 'Art and Socialism' is the template of which Squire's 'Socialism and Art' is the more deterministic copy – a reformulation of utopian communism in the age of Fordist monopoly capitalism, of mass production and monopolisation. It is a 'simplification of life' (Morris's phrase) in an age of mechanistic complication and intensification of labour. As Perry Anderson has argued about Morris's vision of communism, it is 'an *inversion* of the present' where manual labour (handicraft) is the primary value, over and above mental labour, and where science and technology become less rather than more pervasive – indeed in *News From Nowhere* 'Morris produced a kind of craftsman's paradise'.²⁷ Quoting the following passage from Marx's *Grundrisse*, Anderson argues for a dialectical understanding of utopianism: ' "It is as ridiculous to yearn for a return to an original fullness as it is to believe that with this present emptiness history has come to a standstill. The bourgeois viewpoint has never advanced beyond this antithesis between itself and the romantic viewpoint and therefore the latter will accompany it as its legitimate antithesis up to its blessed end" ' (p. 169). Romanticism is the antithesis of capitalism, Utilitarianism and Romanticism are dialectically complementary (p. 169). Like Squire's set of dichotomies: Capitalism-Ugly-Bad /Socialism-Beautiful-Good. Socialism becomes a simplification of life, a regression to the fullness of the past before the advent of capitalism. Opposition is neither synthesised nor surpassed, a point Anderson makes about Morris as well. Tension and

²⁷ Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (London: NLB, 1980), p. 169, p. 167. Anderson also quotes Raymond Williams when he criticises Morris's utopianism 'for attaching "the notion of social simplicity" to communism– arguing that in fact "the break towards socialism can only be towards an unimaginably greater complexity' (p. 166). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

antagonism are resolved by a denial of one set of categories and the affirmation of the other.

If collectivism was a form of utilitarianism politically, then it wouldn't have existed without its complementary opposite, Romantic utopianism.²⁸ For the *NS*, this was literally the case. Which explains why a regressive and limited conception of communism re-emerged again to play a significant role in the cultural sphere of a journal defined by its politics of collectivism and reformism. In the early twentieth century 'ethical socialism' (e.g. Morris, Carpenter, Crane) was still a dominant socialist aesthetic. Collectivism had no aesthetic preferences or pre-dispositions. The Webbs, ironically, rejected Morrisite revolutionary socialism politically only to find it returning in a different form, culturally. Arguably, their political utilitarianism could not have produced an independent aesthetic: ethics, arts, literature and morality were outside of their sphere of interest and intervention.²⁹ Politics and culture were divorced; to change human life was to change forms of political and social organisation. To the Webbs, literature in the

²⁸ As Robin Blackburn has argued: 'Fabian socialism was too often simply a collectivist version of Bentham's utilitarianism' ('A Fabian at the End of his Tether', in *Lines of Dissent: Writing from the New Statesman 1913-1988*, ed. by Stephen Howe (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 284-96 (p. 294) (first publ. in *NS*, 14 December 1979)).

²⁹ This wasn't true of many Fabians, some of whom are discussed by: Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Lesser Fabians, in *The Luddites: and Other Essays* (London: Michael Katanka, 1971), pp. 231-44. 'They [Hubert Bland, William Clarke, Graham Wallas and Sydney Olivier] illustrate the complexity of the intellectual and social elements which went to form the early British socialist movement of the 1880s and the original Fabian Society. They also illustrate the absorption of Fabianism by Sidney Webb, which gradually eliminated the other elements or allowed them to drop out of sight' (p. 232). (Bland and his wife Edith Nesbit, both founder-members of the Fabian Society, come to play an important role in the *NS*'s literary section in 1913, as novel reviewer and fiction contributor, respectively. Incidentally, in 1909 Sharp married Bland's daughter Rosamund, secretary of the Fabian Nursery). See also Ian Britain, *Fabianism and Culture: A Study of British Socialism and the Arts c. 1884-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). Though this study is keen to convey the importance of the arts to Fabianism, it fails to show how the political project of collectivism was a cultural project as well. Even though the Webbs may have enjoyed and been inspired by plays, novels, and culture in general, there is nothing in their establishment of the *NS* to indicate that the pursuit of socialism was seen as anything other than a political-economic programme.

NS would therefore have to be ‘tolerated’ as a means of attracting readers to the more important politics of collectivisation – a necessary side show.

Squire had something else in mind. For him the *NS* would pursue what he saw as the ethics of socialism by conveying the ugliness of contemporary society and the beauty of craftsmanship and co-existence with nature, and the dignity of labour – a value which was central to the medieval utopianism of Guild Socialism. Paradoxically then, set up to counter Guild Socialism in England and recapture the emerging generation for collectivism, the *NS* finds itself celebrating in the literary section those same values it was set up to counter and reject in the political section. This constitutes the founding contradiction of the *NS*: politically collectivist, culturally ethical socialist. In the period leading up to Squire’s departure in 1920, this antagonism produces two competing forms of fiction, urban and rural, which come to define the journal in the early years. A literature conveying the ugliness of the city is published alongside a literature that (mournfully) celebrates the beauty of the countryside. Utopian idealism comes to resolve the problems of city naturalism. So even if, as I have argued, the Webbs had no literary-artistic programme in mind when they set up the *NS*, Squire nonetheless came to rely on an urban sociological literary naturalism in the construction of his ethical-socialist agenda. This, ironically, inserted into the back half what the Webbs had previously actively excluded from their own conception of socialism: an *aesthetics* of collectivism.

1.3.1 Country and City

*From the slimy, spittle-drenched sidewalk, they were picking up bits of orange peel, apple skin, and grape stems, and they were eating them. The pits of greengage plums they cracked between their teeth for the kernels inside. They picked up stray crumbs of bread the size of peas, apple cores so black and dirty one would not take them to be apple cores, and these things these two men took into their mouths, and chewed them, and swallowed them; and this, between six and seven o'clock in the evening of August 20, year of our Lord 1902, in the heart of the greatest, wealthiest, and most powerful empire the world has ever seen.*³⁰

'A Great Time'

Sweet Chance, that led my steps abroad,
Beyond the town, where wild flowers grow –
A rainbow and a cuckoo, Lord,
How rich and great the times are now!
Know, all ye sheep
And cows, that keep
On staring that I stand so long
In grass that's wet from heavy rain –
A rainbow and a cuckoo's song
May never come together again;
May never come
This side the tomb.³¹

Jack London is here describing Carter and Carpenter's journey up the Mile End Road in the heart of the East End of London. On their way to the Poplar Workhouse, they are hoping to find food and a bed for the night, and pay for those with their labour in the morning. Their migration within the bounds of the city is against starvation and death. They are on the move to survive. This constitutes an important part of their mode and condition of survival.

W. H. Davies's poem is a celebration of his ability to leave the town, cross the 'border', and be enveloped by the Lord's creation, the natural world of rainbows, rain and singing birds. His description of the countryside is 'humanless'. Davies believes himself to be in harmony with nature. He is conscious of his role as an observer and recorder of a

³⁰ Jack London, *The People of the Abyss* (London: Isbister, 1903; repr. London: Journeyman Press, 1992), p. 37, original italics.

rural England which is passing away and 'May never come together again'. He goes to the country with this fear and worry in mind, to see what may no longer be there to be seen. It is thus both a 'Sweet Chance' to go and a 'Sweet Chance' to find the diminishing pastorality of the countryside. His is a celebration tinged with mourning.

There is an important dimension to Davies's movement *abroad*. Davies is going alone to the countryside where he is in 'harmony' not with other humans but with birds, sheep, and rainbows; with ruralism. The act of separating from the city and its populace is stressed here. Jack London, however, performs a double movement in *The People of the Abyss*: he 'immigrates' from America, sheds his middle-class clothes, becomes part of the people of the 'abyss', lives their life, and participates in their migration for food and shelter. His 'harmony' is with other humans, with whom he lives and struggles to survive. Jack London is an observer-participator, living and experiencing the conditions of the East End;³² Davies observes and envelops himself in nature. While Jack London describes an actual, lived journey and city experience, Davies offers a falsification of country life.

The People of the Abyss describes the *human* cost of *laissez-faire* capitalism.

The narrative is situated in a specific time and place, in a country (England), a city (London), an area (East End), a street (Mile End), while Davies's experience is robbed of its history; it is timeless. Raymond Williams has described this mode of seeing the countryside as 'an intellectual projection: a version of history which succeeds in

³¹ W. H. Davies, 'A Great Time', *NS*, 23 August 1913, p. 626.

³² See interesting obituary by Oliver Madox Hueffer, 'Jack London: A Personal Sketch', *NS*, 2 December 1916, pp. 206-207.

cancelling history'.³³ Davies's atemporal mode of describing the countryside can thus be contrasted with London's exacting and particularising mode of narration.

Jack London goes further than merely situating his narrative historically. He is able to pinpoint the root cause of the starvation and suffering that he is witnessing; the system which produces and perpetuates it: 'It will be readily apparent to the reader that I saw much that was bad. Yet it must not be forgotten that the time of which I write was considered "good times" in England. The starvation and lack of shelter I encountered constituted a chronic condition of misery which is never wiped out, even in the periods of greatest prosperity'.³⁴ He perceives one and the same historical process; he sees the condition and contradiction of capitalism. In this way, he relates his subjective experiences to what Williams calls a *wider system*.

Jack London belongs to a tradition of social investigation that goes back to the nineteenth century when 'the perception that society was becoming rapidly divided into classes of people separate from and hostile to each other, was felt to be the most fundamental'.³⁵ Like Charles Booth and R. S. Rowntree, Jack London is 'a representative of one class [who] consciously sets out to explore, analyse, and report upon, the life of another class lower on the social scale than his own'. This mode of sociological investigation which involved 'a massive accumulation of detailed information on the conditions in which people lived and worked' also developed into a branch of modern literature, examples of which appear in the pages of the *NS* in 1913-1914. This is hardly surprising since Beatrice Webb herself worked alongside Booth in exploring the life and

³³ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973; repr. London: Hogarth Press, 1993), p. 257.

³⁴ London, *The People of the Abyss*, p. 9.

hardship of the poor. In fact, for the Fabians social investigation was a necessary step towards resolving social problems. Yet it took a Squire to tap onto its fictive potential. The *NS* in this period is therefore full of short stories about the poor, the homeless, the unemployed and working class.

Against this literature of urban exploration comes a literature of urban flight. Davies leaves the city behind and goes to the countryside, a place populated by birds and sheep only. Such is the mystification of the condition of rural England. The extraordinary persistence of such ‘attitudes to the country, and ideas of rural life’ is extensively discussed by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*. Referring to ‘Georgian Poetry’ – Davies being one of its exponents – Williams traces this flight/movement away from the city, this actual and intellectual travel to the country: ‘Such men *came to* the country: that is the critical point. The nerves were already strained, the minds already formed [...] These new men were strained; that was why they had gone [...] But they had brought with them from the cities, and from the schools and universities, a version of rural history which was now extraordinarily amalgamated with a distantly translated literary interpretation’.³⁶

The myth of rural England and the reality of urban life come to play a defining and dominant role in the early fiction of the *NS*. The aim of the following is to chart these two literary forms by discussing concrete examples published in the journal in 1913 and examining their significance to Fabian ideology.

³⁵ Peter Keating, ‘Introduction’ in *Into Unknown England: Selections from the Social Explorers*, ed. by Peter Keating (London: Fontana, 1976), pp. 11-32 (p. 11). Next two quotes are from page 13.

³⁶ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 256.

1.3.2 Looking at the City

‘Thunderstorms’

My mind has thunderstorms,
That brood for heavy hours;
Until they rain me words,
My thoughts are drooping flowers
And sulking, silent birds.

Yet come, dark thunderstorms,
And brood your heavy hours;
For when you rain me words,
My thoughts are dancing flowers
And joyful singing birds.³⁷

This poem by W. H. Davies is the opening poetic contribution of the very first number of the *NS*, 12 April 1913. It posits and expounds on the condition of writing in general and on writing on the countryside in particular. The nature imagery of thunderstorms brooding and raining words is skilfully employed to describe the process of poetic writing. There is a sense that the poet needs the countryside for the act of writing itself, to be able to write poetry. This poem also constructs a connection, seen as inherent, between rurality and the life and function of the poet. For Davies, the world of nature and the words of the poet are one and the same. To use Valentine Cunningham’s construct, the wor(l)d³⁸ is posited as being the stuff of nature in an attempt at achieving a communion between nature and representation, word and thing, cognition and environment. Davies’s condition of wor(l)dliness should be seen in contrast to another condition of writing which this section seeks to analyse: the wor(l)dliness of the city.

³⁷ W. H. Davies, ‘Thunderstorms’, *NS*, 12 April 1913, p. 17.

³⁸ Valentine Cunningham, *In the Reading Gaol: Postmodernity, Texts, and History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 11.

1.3.3 The Creator of Life Descending

‘The Creator of Life’ by Litchfield Woods is a *NS* short story about the impact that poverty in the East End of London has on a writer. The writer moves from noticing to observing to becoming involved, and this process becomes not only the subject of the writing but the condition of writing itself. The East End world dominates the writer’s words.

The story opens with Osmond, the protagonist, looking out of the window of his home: ‘The house stood upon a hill in North London, and Osmond’s attic overlooked south and east the vastness of the city’.³⁹ Having moved to the window ‘as a physical outlet to a spiritual exaltation’, he first notices that ‘the spring freshness of the leaves had changed to that more sombre green which is the presage of decay’. His eyes move from the leaves to the buildings, to St. Paul’s, Tower Bridge, the Monument, all ‘glorified by a sunset radiance which spiritualised the world of roofs and made the city of dreadful night a city of beautiful dream’. His eye catches a building of ‘white purity’ not yet befouled by the London smoke: ‘To Osmond it was a symbol, an affirmation of spiritual values in the face of East End foulness above which it soared’. This thought captures his mind and he finds himself unable to maintain his horizontal roof-top gaze, so that ‘the knowledge of what lay beneath those miles of roofs filled him with sadness. There were the slum, the fetid alley, the noisome public house, dirty half-naked children and children of a larger growth who drank and brawled’. His eyes descend.

Having just finished writing a story with which he is ‘quite satisfied’, he goes to the window to project his optimistic mood on the outside. Yet the window fails as an

³⁹ Litchfield Woods, ‘The Creator of Life’, *NS*, 28 June 1913, pp. 370-72 (p. 370). Unless otherwise indicated, quotes are from p. 370.

‘outlet of spiritual exaltation’ and he becomes burdened by the reality of the city slums. Osmond fails to impose himself on the scene; the scene denies him his optimistic mood. This point is brought home to the reader by the narrator: the inability to impose, to ignore, to write as before, is doubly stressed:

Formerly the exclusively literary mind could dwell serenely apart from the foulness of the world, feeling they were not its business, but now the social problem comes home to the spiritually cloistered. To Osmond, as a writer of stories, it came as something personal and individual, devoid of the statistics and generalisations of the social reformer. A woman in rags depressed him more than a Poor Law report. (p. 371)

This is the world that Osmond is unable to ignore, a world that captures the writer’s words. The serenity and cloisteredness of the writer is gradually destroyed by the reality of the East End. It is an imposing reality for Osmond and for his author, Woods. It interferes with, and intervenes in, the processes of literary production, and ultimately changes and dominates the condition of writing itself.

Osmond stands at the window and broods over such conditions of life. Before going down to take his customary evening walk, the narrator considers Osmond’s thoughts. What is to be done about all this? How can the writer liberate his mind from such a worldly hold? An important point about Osmond’s set of feelings is revealed when his attitude to social reform is made apparent: ‘His altruism was the selfishness of the fastidious: he wanted a happy world to save himself the pain of beholding an unhappy one, for the degradation of men and women hurt him through their likeness to himself’ (p. 371). It is his pain that he wants to end: his own condition of not being able to ignore all this suffering that he seeks to alleviate. He even contemplates murder. His attitude and the set of values that it conveys is worth quoting at length:

For them as human beings he cared not a jot; his sympathetic imagination would prevent him from murdering them himself, but he could have given orders for their slaughter as a preliminary to the establishment of an ideal state with the greatest aplomb. In short, he was a modern altruist and social reformer, at once generous and selfish, compassionate and cruel, pitiful and merciless [...] They served no purpose; they were a misery in themselves and a cause of misery in others. Why did they exist? Would it not be better if they were all exterminated – painlessly, of course – but still exterminated? Even a moment's contemplation of the possibility cheered him, and he set to work repeopling the world with – Osmonds. (p. 371)

Exterminate the poor, the masses. As John Carey argues in *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, these notions were 'firmly rooted in European intellectual orthodoxy'.⁴⁰ For Shaw, whose rhetorical flair Woods evokes here, the poor were essentially bad: 'For my part I hate the poor and look forward eagerly to their extermination'.⁴¹ There were some eugenicists who also wanted to exterminate the poor (the biologically degenerate and unfit), though their official propaganda advocated sterilisation not genocide. Woods, like Shaw, is here employing eugenic rhetoric to describe elimination of poverty. There is no suggestion in either Shaw or Woods that the poor are poor because of biology or hereditary, which is the position of eugenics. In fact, between Fabian beliefs in the transformation of the environment to improve social welfare and the biological determinism of positive or preventive eugenics there is very little ideological common ground. Donald MacKenzie is wrong in seeing eugenics and Fabianism as complementary and compatible, as G. R. Searle has argued: there is a collision 'between a predominantly hereditarian and a predominantly environmental social philosophy'.⁴²

⁴⁰ John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 208.

⁴¹ Quoted in Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 180. Shaw, of course, also wanted to exterminate the rich. Like Woods, what he really wanted was copies of himself to populate the world.

⁴² G. R. Searle, 'Eugenics and Class', in *Biology, Medicine and Society 1840-1940*, ed. by Charles Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 217-42 (p. 225). Searle concludes his essay by saying that MacKenzie's 'proposition that eugenics was the ideology of a newly rising salaried class [like

Sidney Webb's 'Eugenics and the Poor Law: The Minority Report', his address to the Eugenics Society in 1909, should therefore be understood as an attempt to win over eugenics to collectivism by arguing that only under state planning will the stock of the nation be improved: 'No consistent eugenicist can be a "Laisser Faire" individualist unless he throws up the game in despair. He must interfere, interfere, interfere!'.⁴³ Incidentally, to promote ways to manipulate the environment for the betterment the race, the *NS* employed Caleb William Saleeby, a British-born Lebanese Medical Doctor who became one of the most prolific writers on eugenics in Britain. Though an early supporter of Galton, he came to criticise his statistical methods, and those of Karl Pearson, and encouraged Mendelism and the study of the impact of environment on the individual: 'I expressly disclaim an association with or approval of the perversions of eugenics which find utterance on many sides to-day, which have no science behind them, but only the echo of dead formulae from the nineteenth century, and which seem to me to be brutal in spirit, immoral in principle, inaccurate in theory, and wildly impossible in practice'.⁴⁴ In him the *NS* found somebody to explain the way in which scientific discovery can improve the health of the population.

Fabianism] scarcely stands up to critical examination' (p. 235). In fact, eugenics can be understood as the ideological product of the dwindling 'intellectual aristocracy' described by Noel Annan.

For MacKenzie's argument see 'Eugenics in Britain', *Social Studies of Science*, 6 (1976), 499-532. For an informed and original review of the debate over eugenics on the left, especially 'Bolshevik eugenics', see Diane Paul, 'Eugenics and the Left', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45 (October 1984), 567-90

⁴³ Sidney Webb, 'Eugenics and the Poor Law: The Minority Report', *Eugenics Review*, 2 (1910-1911), 233-41 (p. 237).

⁴⁴ Caleb William Saleeby, *The Progress of Eugenics* (London: Cassell, 1914), pp. 20-21. For the *NS*, he wrote under a pseudonym, 'Lens', since Sharp thought him too eccentric a figure to be associated with the journal (see Smith, p. 61). After visiting the US, Saleeby also founded the Sunlight League in 1924 to promote the cause of sunlight and clean air. For biographical information about Saleeby see 'In Memoriam: Caleb William Saleeby', *Sunlight: Journal of the Sunlight League*, 5 (Summer 1943); and his obituary in *The Times*, 9 December 1940. (I am grateful to Nadiin Shehadi of the Lebanese Studies Centre at Oxford for drawing my attention to these sources. It is worth noting that the Centre has a large file on Saleeby, which also includes some of his private correspondence.)

Urban degeneration had been pre-occupying bourgeois reformers since the mid-nineteenth century, as Gareth Stedman Jones has shown in *Outcast London*. How to deal with (and control) the dangerous ‘residuum’ becomes an issue. Eugenics had an answer: sterilization. The Charity Organisation Society from 1869 had a different one. The *NS* rejected both and advocated state intervention in society. Charity and philanthropy added to the problem, the Webbs argued. This is the issue that concerns Woods in ‘The Creator of Life’. His short story is constituted by the urge to change what can no longer be ignored, slums and poverty. But how?

Significantly, at the end Osmond contemplates extermination no longer. And this is also an important point one has to make about the story. He leaves the window, goes down to the poor quarters and saves a child from his awaited fate. Human sympathy overcomes him: ‘Osmond’s heart was filled with the altruist’s facile pity as he neared him; his sympathetic imagination pictured himself thus sitting forlornly alone amidst dirt and squalor, and the idea tortured him’ (p. 371). Osmond puts himself, imaginatively, in the place of the child and finds existence distressing. Taking Bill Simmons, the boy, and assuming responsibility for him is an important and courageous act. It is a personal and individual bourgeois act of charity: an individual’s recognition of social responsibility. Yet, once adopted by Osmond, Bill Simmons will no longer remain Bill Simmons. Woods describes this generous and humane act by Osmond in surprisingly aggressive language: ‘he had destroyed the lad’s universe’ and ‘his creation *would* claim a material comfort correspondent to his new scale of spiritual values, and instinctively and without selfishness he would claim it of his creator’ (p. 372). Osmond becomes ‘the creator of life [who is] filled with a sacred sense of responsibility before the life he had created’ (p.

372). Woods is uncomfortable with this humane behaviour. He is too aware of Osmond's egoism, which fuels (and corrupts) his altruism; a philanthropic altruism (to borrow from Fredric Jameson's critique of George Gissing's *Thyrza*) which is 'a virtually Nietzschean unmasking of the gesture of hostility concealed within the charitable impulse'.⁴⁵ Osmond ventures to create another life in his own image: another 'altruistic' social reformer. It is his bourgeois values that he is seeking to propagate and perpetuate in his 'creation'. This charitable act, with all the sense of generosity that it imparts, is limited. It is a selfish charity. The individual significance of this charity may be immense, but its social significance, however, is very limited. The system will continue to produce more Bill Simmonses, and Osmond ignores this point. He wants personal salvation through charity. That's the way he responds to the pressures of the city. It is a liberal, individualist response at a time when what was needed was a collectivist one. Importantly, he does it to be able to write, so that reality will no longer deny him the spiritual elevation he achieves through art. Ethics and politics come to condition aesthetics: for Osmond social problems have to be resolved before he can return to his art. The writer has to become a social reformer before he can become a writer again. The city won't allow him, as it were, to retreat into aesthetics – which indicates quite forcefully its power over intellectual production at the time. It provides a challenge which has to be reckoned with. The nature of the response determines the nature of the art produced.

⁴⁵ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 199.

1.3.4 The Unemployed and the 'Inefficients'

'Thirty- Five, and "out"!': that's the way B. R. Carter opens his protest against capitalist production of 'unemployment' in his short story 'The Psychology of an "Unemployed" ' of 1913.⁴⁶ Carter sees capitalism as a game played with people's lives where '[a]n empty pocket is an empty world', and where life is measured with money. He describes the search for jobs as a scramble, a ruthless affair, and focuses the reader's attention on the injustice of this way of life: 'Modern industrial life, to all except those who are calling the tune, is like a game of musical chairs. Everybody is rushing round in a mad scramble, and directly the music stops the number of chairs is discovered to be less than the number of performers. The odd man out corresponds to the unemployed, who is thus forced to stand aside and watch his ranks being added to with each cessation of the instrument' (p. 561). These are the conditions under which people are forced to live and survive. The sense of impersonality and alienation from the job-making machine is immense.⁴⁷ Carter describes the bafflement of people when they realise that their own unemployment coincides with a time of economic boom and prosperity:

Never, it appears, has his country been so prosperous as during his months of vainly looking for work [...] "A boom year," sings one party; a "boomerang year," bellows another. "England the market of the world!" chirrup a third; "another million for the Chancellor!" shrieks a fourth. Meanwhile, the notice of "No hands wanted" is posted up outside the factory gates, and "not over 25" becomes the monotonous cry of the "situation vacant" (p. 562).

The 'Psychology of an "Unemployed" ' delineates the patterns of suffering that are common to the unemployed – people Jack London terms the 'inefficients', the human

⁴⁶ B. R. Carter, 'The Psychology of an "Unemployed" ', *NS*, 9 August 1913, pp. 561-3 (p. 561). References are given after quotations in the text.

⁴⁷ Unemployment comes to preoccupy social researchers in the interwar period and a theory of the social psychology of unemployment (where stages of desperation are delineated) is formulated. For a critical appraisal see R. I. McKibbin, 'The "Social Psychology" of Unemployment in Interwar Britain', in *Politics and Social Change in Modern Britain*, ed. by P. J. Waller (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1987), pp. 161-91.

residue that the system constantly produces: 'inefficients are being constantly and wantonly created by the forces of industrial society as it exists today'.⁴⁸

Criticism of the social reformer and charity system can also be found in both Carter and London. Carter sees charity as addressing all the social problems of the unemployed but the right ones: 'It is not the least of the miseries of the "unemployed" that he is nearly always pitied or upbraided as the victim of every social evil but the right one' (p. 562). He sees philanthropists as 'charity-mongers', 'the real moral trespassers', people who in a Bunyan-like scenario would feature as 'the most formidable dragons in the Pathway of Self-respect': 'and the "unemployed" soon finds that the charitable agency is just as rapacious as the money-lender – the only difference being that, whereas the latter demands his pound of flesh, the former insists upon its pound of soul. The philanthropist has been slowly killing the soul of the poor since the beginning of the nineteenth century' (p. 562). For Carter, this is the pit of humiliation. 'The man who steals is often less of a moral trespasser than the man who gives' (p. 562).

Jack London also attacks charity. He describes a 'Sunday meal' with the Salvation Army: 'Numbers of the men had been waiting since five o'clock for it, while all of us had waited at least four hours; and in addition, we had been herded like swine, packed like sardines, and treated like curs, and been preached at, and sung to, and prayed for' (p. 57-8). What the Salvation Army made him feel was that 'when one man feeds another he is that man's master' (p. 57).

⁴⁸ London, *The People of the Abyss*, p. 84. For eugenics, 'inefficient' was a designation not only for the mentally ill, as the Wood Report on Mental Deficiency of 1929 indicates: 'The Wood report described the social problem group as embracing the insane, but also a wide and miscellaneous group comprising "epileptics, paupers, criminals (especially recidivists), unemployables, habitual slum dwellers, prostitutes, inebriates, and other social inefficients' (Charles Webster, 'Eugenic Sterilisation: Europe's Shame', *Health Matters*, 31 (Winter 97/98) [<http://www.healthmatters.org.uk/stories/webster31.html>])

People who were objects of philanthropic dosages resented them. Carter, as much as Jack London, attacks the system that produces the condition of permanent unemployment and charity: a booming economy, the good times, workers pushed out of the production line, 'out', to roam the streets for food and shelter. There they share the bottom of the pit with the 'soul-snatchers', the religious propagandists, who give them a breakfast of 'two slices of bread, one small piece of bread with raisins in it and called "cake", a wafer of cheese, and a mug of "water bewitched" ', and inform them that ' "You will feast in Paradise" ', only on condition you followed the proper directions, of course.⁴⁹ Such is the pattern of suffering experienced by the people of the abyss. Put together, these stories amount to a shared structure of feeling about city life.

Carter's mode of criticism is different, though, from Woods's and Jack London's; it is more detached, with a tinge of cynicism. In his piece, he does not depict himself as living the conditions of the poor, as Jack London does; nor does he imaginatively place himself in their position as Woods uncomfortably places his narrator. He describes the social processes involved in being unemployed and registers the world of 'no vacancy' and the economic pressures that push people down towards the abyss. Unlike Osmond (and Woods for that matter), he does not conceive of his relation to the poor as personal and individual (which is not to idealise this position nor to diminish Carter's own). Carter presents the development (or de-development) from unemployment to charity, and criticises the economic system that perpetuates and reproduces this condition of existence. All three writers adopt a similar way of seeing, trace the same

⁴⁹ London, *The People of the Abyss*, p. 57.

forces that drive the working class towards the abyss, and criticise the system that creates all this.

1.3.5 Realities of the Working City

Up to this point, I have considered a specific dimension within what I am calling the city structure of feeling: the nature of experience among the ‘people of the abyss’, and the ways of noticing and seeing it. At this juncture, and before going on to analyse a contrasting, country, structure of feeling, I would like to consider a different aspect of city experience as registered in the pages of the *NS*, namely that of the realities of working life, of people in work. The working class is identified by the journal as that segment of the community which contains ‘not the poorest members of the population’ but the ‘respectable hard-working folk with regular jobs’, the ““deserving poor” in contradistinction to the very poor’; in other words, people who are not yet queuing for the Salvation Army.⁵⁰

The description above is taken from a short review of *Round about a Pound a Week* by Pember Reeves, which appeared in the ‘Shorter Notices’ section of the *NS*. Reeves’s book contains some of the results of an investigation carried out by the Women’s Group of the Fabian Society, which sought to investigate the question ‘what are the effects on mother and child of insufficient nourishment before and after birth’. The investigation concluded, as was advertised in the *NS*, that ‘a healthy family of four children cannot be reared in decent surroundings on “round about a pound a week” ’.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Pember Reeves, *Round about a Pound a Week*, rev. by Anon., *NS*, 22 November 1913, p. 220. Next quote is from this review as well.

⁵¹ ‘Advertisement’, *NS*, 22 November 1913, p. 221.

The review itself concludes that: ‘This book brings home better than any other during the last few years the meaning of the social problem’.

The malnutrition of working-class children is the subject of a *NS* short story entitled ‘In the Weighing Room’, also written by Pember Reeves (otherwise known as M. S. Reeves). The story’s action revolves around a weighing machine, where the living conditions of working-class families are, as it were, measured and ‘weighed’. The number of children, the wages of the husband, and the length of the breast-feeding period are ‘uncovered’ by the machine. The stories of Mrs. Wilson, Mrs. Driver, Mrs. Taylor, Mrs. Mullet, and Mrs. Butler are relayed and the verdict of ‘gone down’ in weight is pronounced. Mrs. Glover is discovered not to have weaned her baby after a year’s breast-feeding; she also admitted to ‘attending the hospital for pains in the eyes, but had not told the doctor she was nursing a baby of a year old’.⁵² The world of the weighing machine is a world where ‘information is extricated’, verdicts are pronounced, and mothers confess; all this as if the fact of poverty has to be extracted. It is a social exchange which depicts the malnutrition of the working poor. The machine has a prominent place in this piece, measuring poverty and suffering.

The regulation of working life by machines, the ‘machination’ of labour and society, also feature prominently in my next *NS* short story. ‘Metlingham Heath’ by Kinton Parkes depicts a working class under the sway of the machine: ‘The Heath Bull dominates the neighbourhood [...] At half-past five in the morning, at six o’clock, at half-past eight, at nine o’clock, at one o’clock, at two o’clock, at six o’clock at night, the Heath Bull bellows. His bellow is a dread voice, and all the dwellers in Metlingham

⁵² M. S. Reeves, ‘The Weighing Room’, *NS*, 30 August 1913, pp. 659-60 (p. 659). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

Heath [...] awake at its first command, and the rest of the day is dominated by it'.⁵³ The life of the town circles around this steel factory. The Bull ushers people to work and announces their breaks. Its control does not end here. It is a machine that controls the machines inside the factory. '[A]t no other behest than that of the Bull' does the machinery stop. The workers pray for it to stop, but to no avail: 'Only the Bull bellows orders and the engines move or come to rest'. The Bull represents the mechanisation and automation of human labour and the alienation of the workers from the decision-making processes that determine and regulate their own work.

The machine does not only regulate the life of the community, it scars and kills as well:

Girls and women and boys and men guard the machines; for the machines are very monsters. In spite of all the guarding, in spite of men and women, factory inspectors and laws of the realm, the machines will take their revenge on their guardians. Every day they take their toll: the beautiful head of a girl of seventeen is scalped entirely by the running gear, and, if the girl herself is saved, she goes hideous for life.

Under existing conditions of labour, the factory is a place where a slight distraction of the male worker, a gentle wink at the girl passing by, is liable to cause the 'operator' to lose a finger or a hand. Indeed, such hazardous conditions and the absence of safety measures to safeguard against death or serious injury are also discussed in an article in the political section of the *NS* entitled 'Lives Versus Profits', which sparked off the longest exchange in the journal's correspondence section in 1913.

This article begins with a comment about an inquest carried out by the Westminster Coroner following the death of a worker who was crushed by an iron load,

⁵³ Kington Parkes, 'Metlingham Heath', *NS*, 14 June 1913, pp. 306-307 (p. 306). All subsequent quotations are from page 307. Parkes was born in 1865 in Aston Manor, Warwickshire. After graduating from Mason

which crashed down on him after a link in the chain of the crane had snapped. At the inquest, the representative of the firm which made the chain is asked whether after testing they go over their chains ‘to see if there are any cracks?’. The representative replies: ‘“No; the profits will not allow it”’. The *NS* sees in the answer ‘a simple exposition of the existing relation between commerce and the lives of workmen’ and regards the case as ‘indicative of the conditions prevalent throughout British industry’.⁵⁴ Armed with the statistics for 1912 showing that ‘403 railway servants were killed and 28,200 were injured in the performance of their duty’ (p. 231), the article goes on to become a comprehensive criticism of the conditions of labour in British industry, and of the commercial values which dominate it. The journal is baffled by the fact that: ‘At the present moment men’s lives are being consciously and deliberately sacrificed in order to save the pockets of railway shareholders; and the community is allowing the sacrifice to continue’ (p. 232). For the *NS*, campaigning for railway nationalisation, such incidents were grist to their mill, and evidence of the present supremacy of profits over lives in private industry: ‘The truth is that as long as profit is the pivot on which the whole industry turns there is little that can be done’ (p. 232). Under existing conditions of labour, the journal argued, even the most minimal standards of safety for workers are absent.

‘The Weighing Room’, ‘Mettingham Heath’, and ‘Lives Versus Profits’ present different yet related aspects of the lives of working-class people as registered in *NS* in

College, Birmingham, Parkes came to occupy the position of Principal of the Nicholson Institute, Leek, from 1891-1911. For brief list of publications see *Who Was Who* (CD Rom version).

⁵⁴ ‘Lives Versus Profits’, *NS*, 31 May 1913, pp. 231-2 (p. 231). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

1913.⁵⁵ These pieces belong to a certain way of looking at urban conditions; to a particular structure of feeling which seeks to register the living conditions of workers and the poor in a society which operates under the sway of capitalist production. According to this way of structuring the city, the poor, the unemployed, and the working class are objects to be looked at, to be observed and written about for the middle-class reader. The intended readership or segment of society to which these observations are offered is clearly not the one actually experiencing these conditions. The reports of the investigations of the women's Fabian Group were addressed to a middle-class readership. Emil Davies's book on the need for the railways to be run by a unified state-owned and nationalised system is also addressed to the same class of social reformers.⁵⁶ A review of *Men and Rails*, a book on the lines of 'Lives Versus Profits' which advocates putting the lives of workers before the profits of shareholders, also concludes by stating that a copy of this book 'should be presented to every railway director'.⁵⁷

The actual fact of noticing these city experiences is, clearly, important in itself. Equally important is the adopted mode of registering and perceiving: how were the 'lower classes' being represented? According to this dominant *NS* way of looking, the

⁵⁵ The details of other short stories published in the *NS* which treat similar aspects of working class life, but are not of direct relevance to this discussion, are as follows: Charlotte M. Mew, 'An Old Servant' *NS*, 18 October 1913, pp. 49-51; Angela Gordon, 'Lancelot: A Brief Biography', *NS*, 21 June 1913, pp. 338-9; St. John G. Ervine, 'Adventure', *NS*, 17 May 1913, pp. 178-9.

In 1913, the *NS* published only two short stories by D. H. Lawrence ('The Fly in the Ointment', *NS*, 16 August 1913, pp. 595-7; and 'A Sick Collier', *NS*, 13 September 1913, pp. 722-4); and a poem ('Service of All the Dead', *NS*, 15 November 1913, p. 178). Considering the fact that Lawrence wrote many short stories about working-class life in the coal fields of the Midlands, where country and city concerns converged, he received far too little notice in the *NS* of 1913. The first mention of Lawrence in the journal is made by Hubert Bland, in his review of *Sons and Lovers*. Bland felt that the novel lacked structure, and that Lawrence had not planned out the novel before sitting down to write. Bland's lukewarm reception of the novel concludes with the following sentence: '*Sons and Lovers* is a noteworthy novel and would have been noteworthy at any time during these last dozen of years' (5 July 1913, p. 408).

⁵⁶ Emil Davies was the writer of 'The City' column in *NS*. The review of his book *The Case for Railway Nationalisation* appeared in the *NS* on 12 July 1913, pp. 441-42.

⁵⁷ Rowland Kenney, *Men and Rails*, rev. by Anon., *NS*, 1 November 1913, pp. 120-21 (p. 121).

working class, the starving poor, and the unemployed are politically inactive, in need of either charity and assistance or of having their lives controlled and regulated by elements from outside their own class. This is quite a surprising way of depicting the working class in the period before the First World War, a period characterised by a strong radicalisation of workers and an increasing Trade Union agitation for better wages and conditions work. The one time the existence of a trade union (or a politically active working-class organisation) is registered in a *NS* short story, it is depicted as a scheming organisation attempting to deceive the workers and rob them of their money.⁵⁸

Although my example stories are critical of the commercial foundations of society and attempt to expose the degrading conditions of labour, workers are still depicted as politically impotent and heavily dependent on bourgeois attention and initiative. The working class is not depicted as a unionised and class-conscious force. In fact, as I argued earlier, the *NS* was founded on such an original denial, having been established to counter and combat exactly such notion of working-class self-management and self-organisation then being advocated by the Guild Socialists. Fabians, unlike Guild Socialists, refused to see the working class as a potentially strong political agent capable of administering and managing its own affairs and conditions of labour. They wanted to provide '*for*' the working class, to find ways of improving their lot through the 'right' management of the national resources and their more efficient organisation. As Raymond Williams has argued, this is indeed the main deficiency of such an approach to social reform: 'It is deficient in many respects: in its intrinsic reduction of the poor to objects of study; in its depersonalisation by classification and grading; in its lack of general ideas about the

⁵⁸ St. John G. Ervine, 'Sunday Morning', *NS*, 6 September 1913, pp. 689-90.

character of society'.⁵⁹ With it comes a falsification of the working class as a socially and politically dependent class.

Bourgeois social exploration and investigation comes to serve this authoritarian elitism. In essence, the Fabian enterprise was premised on achieving reform through social investigation – looking, assessing, measuring suffering, and observing the conditions of life of the ‘lower classes’.⁶⁰ As Clifford Sharp states in his opening editorial of the *NS*:

We shall strive to face and examine social and political issues in the same spirit in which the chemist or the biologist faces and examines his test-tubes or his specimens, ignoring none of the factors, seeking to demonstrate no preconceived proposition, but trying only to find out and spread abroad the truth whatever it may turn out to be. Social problems may not be – indeed, are not – susceptible of scientific analysis in the popular acceptance of that term, since human beings are not to be weighed in balances nor measured with micrometers; but unless there can be applied to them something at least of the detachment of the scientific spirit, they will never be satisfactorily solved.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 222.

⁶⁰ This perspective on social problems was influenced by the ‘reform by statistics’ approach – the Blue Books approach criticised by Charles Dickens in *Hard Times*, but, essentially, endorsed by Benjamin Disraeli in *Sybil: or, The Two Nations*. It parallels classification work going on in ethnology – work which would, aided by biology, become a racist sociology in a few years time. George Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier* also presents the social explorer as a detective hunting for ‘facts’, observing and documenting social reality.

For treatment of the practice and discourse of social observation and investigation and their revolutionary evocation in English fiction see Valentine Cunningham’s analysis of George Eliot’s ‘The Natural History of German Life’ in his introduction to *Adam Bede*, World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. vii–xl. Cunningham argues that Eliot in *Adam Bede* employs a method of writing influenced by investigations in Natural History. It is ‘a writing driven by a moral obligation to avoid forgone conclusions, narrow prejudice, professionally driven ideologies; a discourse that would never not be self-conscious about being in the business of seeing, looking, noticing, interpreting’ (xii). This method of examining social reality is also advocated by the editor of the *NS* in the next quote.

⁶¹ Clifford Sharp [unsigned], ‘The *New Statesman*’, *NS*, 12 April 1913, p. 5. The significance of science as a means of understanding society and of solving existing social problems is also treated by Upton Sinclair in an article in the *NS* entitled ‘On Re-Reading Homer’, 10 May, 1913, pp. 145–7. The benefits of an education in the social sciences is contrasted with and posited against a ‘classical’ education. Sinclair argues that far too much attention is given to studying the classics in a world where they are no longer ‘relevant’ to contemporary concerns. Only science can provide the tools to comprehend and tackle modern-day problems. By training students, education should aim at nurturing the objective scientific spirit: ‘Consider, for instance, that our average university graduate knows nothing of hygiene, nothing about the social evil, nothing about modern economics, and, in most cases, nothing about modern science’ (p. 146). It is exactly this ignorance which the Webbs sought to address by establishing the *LSE*. For an affirmation of the importance of ‘classical’ training and a rejection of Sinclair’s scientific orientation see Gerald Gould, ‘Homer and Mr. Sinclair: A Reply’, *NS*, 24 May 1913, pp. 209–10, which ends with: ‘I open my Homer at

This is part of the social scientific project of equipping the State with the necessary knowledge to identify and resolve social problems, a road which Sharp sees other countries taking as well.⁶² The *NS* would therefore be committed to the pursuit of a definite ideal of collectivism and ‘a greater corporate responsibility, a greater corporate activity, and a greater corporate control of the resources and social conditions of the nation’.⁶³ A *laissez-faire* economy accompanied by either random individual philanthropy or organised private charity is no longer a viable way to organise society. Such is the Fabian response: ‘the problem of poverty has now reached such a magnitude that only State action can be truly effective’.⁶⁴ As Williams has also argued: ‘It is a mode which belongs with the substitution of social services for random charity: the services themselves (administered then as now in the spirit of the investigations, but administered and extended nonetheless) are a response of a new kind to the problems of the city’.⁶⁵

Within the Fabian political project of substituting social services for charity, the *NS* short stories about city life published in 1913 perform an important task, by drawing attention to the limits of charity, the suffering of the unemployed, and the devaluation of human life by profit. Culture delineates the social disasters of liberal capitalism. It was up

the twenty-fourth Iliad, and I envy no man’. After the death of Hubert Bland in 1914, Gould became the main reviewer of novels (‘New Novels’) for the *NS* and held the position until 1918. His contrasting views to those of the Webbs are another example of how the literary section contradicted the political one.

⁶² Support for this position was also mustered in the review section of the journal, where Florence Nightingale’s contributions to social scientific investigation are acknowledged by Sir Edward Cook in his favourable review of *The Life of Florence Nightingale*, which appeared on 15 November 1913, pp. 183-84. Cook states, in Sharpian mode: ‘She became a passionate statistician and collector of information. She made an invaluable discovery that the average statesman is completely ignorant of the facts of political problems, and so is made servile to the wishes of the permanent officials. Her job obviously was to supply the Ministers with facts which would free them from the permanent officials.... She had no use for the *laissez-faire* school of political economy. It was false and wicked. She wrote in favour of the state organisation of industry’ (p. 184).

⁶³ [Sharp], ‘The New Statesman’, p. 5.

⁶⁴ Keating, *Into Unknown England*, p. 19.

⁶⁵ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 222.

to the political section to suggest specific ways of ‘remedying the social defects’,⁶⁶ thus complementing and completing the work of the literary section. All the latter had to do was to present the ugliness of contemporary conditions of life and labour. Squire, though, had additional aim, an agenda of his own to pursue: the revival of the myth of rural England. If such is the situation in the city, he reasoned, why not turn your back on it and go *back* to the country. This is the topic of the next section.

⁶⁶ [Sharp], ‘The *New Statesman*’, p. 5. .

1.4.1 Looking at the Countryside

Raymond Williams has described writers of pre-war England who went to the countryside as having had their nerves already strained and their minds already formed. They came to the country to detach themselves from the pressures and social problems of the city.⁶⁷ Their writing is often about this migration. Issue number eight of the *NS* clearly registers a direct opposition between problems of the city and dreams of the country. Along with 'Lives Versus Profits', which addressed urban industrial problems, there appeared an article on the Bengali poet Tagore, and a short story by J. C. Squire. Discussion of these will lead to a consideration of how feelings about the countryside were structured – which is the subject of this section.

'A Voice from the East', by S. K. Ratcliffe, describes Rabindranath Tagore's visit to England and summarises the basis of his defiance 'of western ways and thought and society' and his questioning of 'the conquering West'.⁶⁸ The problem Tagore has with the west is its distance from the forest: 'The life of India, he tells us, derives from the forest; while we in Europe are imprisoned in cities, where brick walls separate us inexorably from our fellows' (p. 242). This leads to the pursuit of profit and the accumulation of possessions. For Tagore, the West is living a soul-less existence, leading to disharmony between the individual and the 'spirit of the universe'. Westerners are not only walled-in and imprisoned but also claim a false superiority: 'The western man claims the mastery of the world; yet he lives in a society where the mass of his fellows are sunk in ugliness and ignorance and want' (p. 242). To gain its freedom and solve its social problems, the

⁶⁷ For a depiction of the pressures of modern city life see Gerald Gould 'Time and Tube', *NS*, 19 July 1913, pp. 467-9. A grocer's fear of the city is expressed in A. W. G. Randall, 'An Anachronism', *NS*, 11 September 1913, pp. 17-8.

west should break the bounds of the city prison and win back a vital contact with the real, the forest.

The feeling of being walled-in and the desire to break away from the city and go to an Indian wood is also expressed in Reginald Ingram's poem 'Song':

These plots I cannot bear to see,
 These alleys trim and straightly bordered,
 Because the heart that beats in me
 Is none so delicately ordered.

O were I in an Indian wood
 With all its huge and pied confusion,
 'Twould better please my present mood;
 These comely growths are a delusion.⁶⁹

The order of the city alienates Ingram from the sounds and noises of the forest, which signifies both nature outside and the poet's own true nature inside. The city denies the poet his natural self. Curiously, in Tagore and Ingram we, respectively, have an Indian poet attacking western industrial civilisation and an English poet wanting to be in an Indian forest.

Immediately following the essay on Tagore the literary editor of the *NS*, J. C. Squire, publishes a short story of his own entitled 'The Basket of Flowers', which is about dreaming of the countryside and waking up in the city. Squire finds a ravishingly arranged basket of flowers; the whole pattern whispers the word 'harmony' to him: 'Basket, flowers, and ground, beautiful in their colours, seemed nevertheless all to have been steeped in some rare pale common medium that gave them a more than ordinary

⁶⁸ S. K. Ratcliffe, 'A Voice from the East', *NS*, 31 May 1913, pp. 241-2 (p. 241). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

⁶⁹ Reginald Ingram, 'Song', *NS*, 19 July 1913, p. 467.

harmony'. Where does this beauty come from, Squire asks, 'in a world gone harsh?'.⁷⁰ Beside the flowers he sees 'not one maiden, but two young girls in thin white dresses come running towards me over the grass with laughter like tinkling bells' (p. 243). The pastoral dream is complete with meadows, flowers, and maidens. When the maidens decide to run away over the meadows, reality dawns and: 'The atmosphere in front of me began to spin and revolve and turn inside out. And, alas! there were no trees and no meadow; but only a basket of flowers on the wall-paper pattern in a bedroom in a Manchester hotel' (p. 243). Squire dreams of escape into a fantasy country retreat away from the walls and confines of the city. Significantly, it is a specific city that he wants to leave, Manchester, the heart of Industrial England. The dream fuels both the writing and the narrative, which the reality of Manchester at the end shatters: the story with the naming of the city.

W. H. Davies calls this condition of writing through imaginative separation from the confines of the city 'the mind's liberty' (also the title of a poem he publishes in the *NS*). The first half of the poem is worth quoting in full since it clearly voices the relation between the mind of the writer and the city. Where does the mind roam in order to leave its physical constraints?

The mind, with its own eyes and ears,
 May for these other have no care;
 No matter where this body is,
 The mind is free to go elsewhere.
 My mind can be a sailor, when
 This body's still confined to land;
 And turn these mortals into trees,
 That walk in Fleet Street or the Strand.⁷¹

⁷⁰ J. C. Squire, 'The Basket of Flowers', *NS*, 31 May 1913, pp. 242-43 (p. 243). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

⁷¹ W. H. Davies, 'The Mind's Liberty', *NS*, 1 November 1913, p. 115.

The mind has its own eyes and ears, and the body is not an obstacle to flight to the countryside. Whilst Squire dreams of a place away from the city, Davies does more. He turns humans into trees in the heart of London's West End. Davies, in a sense, does not need to go to the country; he sees the country in the city. He eliminates city reality, does not even mystify it, and sails away on the seas of London. This is an amazing imaginative feat; while Squire avoids the city, Davies completely eliminates it as an active presence. He liberates himself from it by, as it were, writing over it.

According to the fiction of the *NS*, in the city one lives in 'plots' and 'straightly bordered' alleys, as Ingram has it, and away from 'the earth and water and light', as Ratcliffe has it. How to revolt against the metropolis becomes the question? Through writing and the imagination, through journeying to the country is the Georgian answer.

1.4.2 Once

The flight to the country is also a flight away from ugliness. Ratcliffe describes the city as a place where the majority of people are 'sunk in ugliness and ignorance and want'. This way of seeing the city strongly structures feelings about the country. Edith Nesbit equates her contemporary London with ugliness.⁷² The resilient aspects of nature that have withstood the expansion of industrialism are what constitute beauty for Nesbit. Her *NS* essay 'Once' meditates on the aesthetic aspects of the past and the ugliness, cheapness, and nastiness of contemporary surroundings. It opens with a strikingly nostalgic sentence: 'Things are not what they were'.⁷³ Nature and the countryside are the

⁷² She also stresses the unchristian nature of the city in her *Ballads and Lyrics of Socialism* (1908), written for the Fabian Society, and her poem *Jesus in London* (1908).

⁷³ Edith Nesbit, 'Once', *NS*, 21 June 1913, pp. 336-7 (p. 336). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

standard by which the aesthetic is measured; unconquerable mountaintops exist as a reminder of what beauty is. Her description is saturated with pastoral imagery: 'trees, rivers, and the laughter of little children, flowers, the sea at those points where piers are impracticable, and mountains, the ones steep and stony enough to resist the jerry-builder and the funicular railway' (p. 336). These are the truly beautiful things in life. Beauty thus becomes 'a naturalised, uninspected and vaguely uplifting convention'.⁷⁴

Nesbit also argues that the standards of measuring beauty have dwindled: 'It seems to me that it is not only that the ugly and unmeaning things have grown, like a filthy fungus, over the sheer beauty of the world, but that the things which we mean to be beautiful are not beautiful and the things which we mean to be interesting lack interest' (p. 336). As a result of the expansion of the city to the country, standards that define 'the beautiful' have become confused, resulting in the appreciation of things that are ugly. Like E. M. Forster in *Howards End*. Forster also registers the growing difficulty of living in the city and mourns London's expansion into the countryside: 'And month by month the roads smelt more strongly of petrol, and were more difficult to cross, and human beings heard each other speak with greater difficulty, breathed less of the air, and saw less of the sky. Nature withdrew: the leaves were falling by midsummer; the sun shone through dirt with an admired obscurity'.⁷⁵ 'Once', Nesbit says, 'there were nightingales that sang in the gardens on Loampit Hill. Now it is all villas'. The 'hilly fields', the 'grassy lanes', and the flowers have all been covered by the 'filthy fungus'; 'It is asphalt

⁷⁴ Peter Brooker and Peter Widdowson, 'A Literature for England', in *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920*, ed. by Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 116-64 (p. 128).

⁷⁵ (London: Edward Arnold, 1910; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 115. The result of this expansion is that the city will more and more dominate fiction to the detriment of country writing: 'The earth as an artistic cult has had its day, and the literature of the near future will probably ignore the country and seek inspiration from the town'. (p. 116). For Brooker and Widdowson, *Howards End* is myth being substituted for history (p. 139).

all the way' (p. 337). Everything has been affected, 'in London old handsome houses are tenements and children play on the dirty doorsteps of them with dead mice and mutton bones for toys. In the country women wear men's tweed instead of sun bonnets' (p. 337). The grand finale of this *tour de force* of seeing ugliness in everything lies in the last three lines of the essay: 'And everything is getting uglier and uglier. And no one seems to care. And only we old people remember that things were not always ugly, remember how different things were – once'.

E. Nesbit could regret the growth of urbanisation, and at the same, as a socialist, think that labourers and the poor should be properly housed.⁷⁶ This is not an uncommon combination of attitudes to hold, especially for ethical socialists like Nesbit. The problems of the city are resolved away by recourse to a mythical past: rural, plentiful, and English (to which I will return). Yet, if the perceived ugliness of the city 'strained the nerves' of writers and prompted their flight to the countryside, what exactly did they see in the country? Did they notice actual historical changes that were taking place there at the time; did they note the poor wages and conditions of farm labourers and their continuous migration to the city. In other words, did they perceive the country as a space of actual living, or did they impose their own vision on it, intellectually project (in Williams's terms)?

⁷⁶ For a discussion of Nesbit's views see Julia Briggs, *A Woman of Passion: The Life of E. Nesbit 1858-1924*, p. 321-3, and its further treatment in Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 49. For a discussion of Nesbit's attitude towards the poor and working class see Alec Ellis, 'E. Nesbit and the Poor', *The Junior Bookshelf*, 38 (1974), 72-8. Briggs doesn't seem to be aware of the fact that Nesbit was extensively published in the *NS*. Her contributions to the *NS* in 1913 consist of four short stories ('The Cenotaph', *NS*, 3 May 1913, pp. 113-5; 'The Hare', *NS*, 27 September 1913, pp. 785-7; 'The November Garden', *NS*, 15 November 1913, pp. 178-9; and, 'The Witch', *NS*, 20 December 1913, pp. 337-8); two essays ('Once', *NS*, 21 June 1913, pp. 336-7; and, 'Romance', *NS* (Literary Supplement), 6 December 1913, pp. ix-x); and a poem ('Gretna Green', *NS*, 24 May 1913, p. 210).

1.4.3 Animals, Witches, and Ghosts

The experience of the migrating writer is clearly expressed in W. H. Hudson's *NS* short story 'In a Churchyard'. The position of the writer as observer-traveller comes across vividly in this piece: 'Chitterne is one of those small out-of-the-world villages in the south Wiltshire downs which attract one mainly because of their isolation and loneliness and their unchangeableness'.⁷⁷ Hudson goes 'out-of-the-world' in search for isolation and static ruralism. There he encounters two country women in a churchyard and registers their exchange. He depicts them as irrational beings, and at the end finds it difficult to comprehend their logic. More importantly, however, these women recognise the Hudson-like type: 'I was nothing to them – merely one of another class, a foreigner, so to speak, a person cycling about the country who was just taking a ten minutes' peep at the place to gratify an idle curiosity' (p. 51). Hudson is conscious of his position, a migratory traveller, edging into foreign land, outside his social sphere and outside his class.

This is also Edith Nesbit's position in her story on hare coursing, 'The Hare', also published in the *NS* in 1913.⁷⁸ This piece utilises two significant experiences quite commonly registered in what I'm calling the country structure of feeling: cruelty to animals and the sighting of witches and ghosts. For Nesbit, what begins as a legitimate and well-presented attack on the cruel practice of hare coursing becomes an affirmation of the strange and witchly dimensions of the countryside. Until the narrator actually sees how hares are killed, he is persuaded into the belief that 'to end in "a moment's horror, bright, bloody, and brief," was far better than to die of starvation in a ditch, which, it

⁷⁷ W. H. Hudson, 'In the Churchyard', *NS*, 18 October 1913, pp. 51-2 (p. 51). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

seems, is the natural end of hares who are not coursed'.⁷⁹ This innocence is shattered when the narrator sees the 'mortal terror' of a hare being chased by dogs. He feels disgusted and shaken by the scene. It is here, when a criticism of coursing starts to be registered, that the witch arrives into the story. The next hare disappears in the direction of a barn. There the following crowd meet a local peasant woman having her breakfast, who indicates to them the direction of the fleeing hare. The narrator lingers on to talk to the stranger and admits to having had enough of coursing. Suddenly, the woman raises her apron and shows the narrator that she'd been hiding the hare all along: "'They do not mind me", said she. "Don't tell no one, will you?"' (p. 787). The narrator, unable to save the hare himself, does a telling thing: he gives the woman money; he tips her for her services to nature, and in the story the woman takes it 'with a child's simplicity and a child's pleasure' (p. 787). On asking the villagers about her identity, the narrator is told that she is a witch and an unchristian being. Hare coursing as a fictional concern is duly dropped, and cruelty to animals dwindles away while '[t]houghts of Dryads and Nymphs' roaming the countryside come to dominate the country scene (p. 787).⁸⁰

Like Nesbit's piece, Edward Thomas's travel in the countryside results in meeting a ghost – one who has been roaming the countryside in search of her mother for the last hundred years.⁸¹ Imagination here reigns supreme, and overcomes any potential for dealing with actual lived experiences in the country. Thomas's writings have in fact been

⁷⁸ In this story, Nesbit assumes the identity of a man who roams the countryside and narrates this piece. Similarly, it is a man who narrates another short story by Nesbit also published in the journal, entitled 'The Witch'. This seems to have been the conventional literary mode of travel in the countryside.

⁷⁹ E. Nesbit, 'The Hare', *NS*, 27 September 1913, pp. 785-7 (p. 786). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

⁸⁰ See also Pan in E. M. Forster's *The Longest Journey*.

⁸¹ Edward Thomas, 'The Mossy Shoes', *NS*, 24 May 1913, pp. 210-11. Edward Thomas, as a ruralist and writer on the countryside, continued the rural tradition of Richard Jefferies. In 1909, he also published a

described as ‘primarily escapist and therapeutic’, part of his mode of ‘continually retreating into the world of dreams and waking visions that are employed clumsily and perfunctorily’.⁸² Keith also argues that this is part of Thomas’s strategy of imposing a literary version on the countryside: ‘an intellectual position that is brought to, instead of derived from, the rural subject matter [...] Thus at one point he goes so far as to state [in *The Heart of England* (1906)], “I rarely see much in the country”, an astonishing remark from one so often praised for the minuteness of his natural observation, but he goes on to explain the paradox by admitting: “I always carry out into the fields a vast baggage of prejudices from books and strong characters that I have met ”’.

For a real criticism of cruelty to animals, unobstructed by nymphs and maidens, one needs to go elsewhere in the *NS*, outside of this particular structure of feeling, to a different way of looking at the countryside. The journal’s dominant mode of perceiving the countryside prevents, obscures, and mystifies real countryside experiences. The first non-fiction piece critical of cruelty to animals deals with the issue of the extermination of the badger in England as a result of badger baiting. This essay is quite explicit about the process of badger killing: ‘It is a great thing to possess a dog of such courage that he will go to earth after a badger and have pieces bitten out of his face till he is blind with blood – and that for hours without a chance of coming to grips with his enemy’.⁸³ The badger is not seen as an object to be admired and described, but as part of a living nature. Aspects of the badger’s life are thus presented and described in true naturalist vein: ‘It is an

study on Jefferies: *Richard Jefferies: His Life and Work*. Like Nesbit and Forster, his work registers the destruction of nature and the country by the expansion of the city.

⁸² W. J. Keith, *The Rural Tradition: William Cobbett, Gilbert White, and other Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1975), p. 195, p. 200. Next quote is also from p. 200. For a different perspective on Thomas see Kim Taplin, *The English Path* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1979).

education in the habits of a very special animal to inspect the little arrangements and economics round a badger's sett' (p. 369). The badger's misfortune lies in the fact that he provides entertainment for the gentry outside the fox-hunting season: 'The real fact against the badger is that his destruction provides sport in the season when there is no hunting of foxes' (p. 369). The badger 'clings pretty tightly, as the perspiring diggers and bleeding dogs can testify; but fifteen men with four spades, three dogs, sacks, tongs and other implements of the "sport", are not quite fair odds' (p. 370). The result is that the badger 'has been exterminated from probably half of our English counties' (p. 369). Unlike Nesbit, Desmond sees no witch to distract him from the object of his concern, and his piece is therefore able to voice a powerful criticism of a cruel social practice.

The publication of Desmond's essay might explain the passionate review that the volume *The Under Dog* received in the *NS*: 'We should like the facts it brings forward shouted from the roof tops'. This book was subtitled, as the review explains, 'A series of papers by various authors on the wrongs suffered by animals at the hands of man'; and, the object of *The Under Dog* is to expose 'the cruelty perpetuated by men upon animals [that] flourishes in the dark' and to 'bring it to light'.⁸⁴ This is part of a response to the country where the literary imagination is kept at bay; no maidens or ghosts are spotted. Social practices are what matters here.

Another 1913 essay, by Horace Horsnell, appropriately entitled 'The Truth about Birds', opposes the intellectual projection onto birds of literary or human characteristics (anthropomorphism). Horsnell attacks the tradition of seeing birds as angelic and attractive objects to be admired: 'I am concerned solely with an attack upon a false and

⁸³ G. G. Desmond, 'The Badger Goes', *NS*, 28 June 1913, pp. 369-70 (p. 369). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

wholly unmerited tradition – namely, that which has gathered about that species of animal life, the so-called bird’.⁸⁵ The main object of this essay is to attack this intellectual, poetic tradition. He bluntly states that: ‘Birds are reptiles. That fact cannot be too strongly insisted upon’ (p. 436). Awe of birds, the author argues, is inspired by the fact that birds have wings and can fly. Why then, Horsnell asks, is not such esteem afforded to the aeroplane? Furthermore, birds are not really patriotic: ‘Birds are as devoid of virtues as they are replete with vices [...] Their awful lack of anything approaching patriotism is manifested in their blatant and migratory cosmopolitanism’ (p. 435). Amongst some of this imperialist blabber about the soul-lessness of birds and their un-nationalistic behaviour, there is an attempt to make a serious point: ‘one can still suggest that the sympathy and sentiment that is so undeservedly showered upon them might be devoted to a more worthy and rewarding cause’ (p. 436). Such a matter-of-fact approach to birds is obviously different from the literary flights of fancy that impose on birds an angelic existence. In the age of aeroplanes, when man had conquered the skies, why do poets still pay homage to birds, Horsnell asks. It would have been interesting to know what he does consider to be ‘a more worthy and rewarding cause’. This, unfortunately, is left unstated.

A final example of a realist as opposed to a Georgian romantic approach to the country can be found in the same issue in which Davies’s ‘Thunderstorms’ appears. In the ‘Shorter Notices’ part of the literary section, the *NS* published a review of a book by F. E. Green entitled *The Tyranny of the Countryside*. The book is praised for being ‘a verbal and actual picture of the village’ and the writer is presented as being ‘hopeful of a

⁸⁴ Sidney Twist, *The Under Dog*, rev. by Sidney Twist, *NS*, 23 August 1913, p. 636.

great revolt, by which the agricultural labourer will secure himself something better than his present conditions or the ever pressing alternative of the town slums'.⁸⁶ A different structure of feeling emerges here; though it is significant that it only deserves a brief mention.

People of the countryside speak through this book. The author goes to the villages not to impose his own vision, but to learn, listen, and understand, and then write about what the countryside means to the people who are actually living in it. He travels through the Cotswolds, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire, Hampshire, Dorset and Surrey, some of the places covered by Hudson, Thomas, and the Georgian literary travellers. One way of describing how he looks at the countryside is by saying that he descends, goes down. This mirrors the descent to the abyss of London and Woods – an urban mode of exploration finds its way to the country. As in the following paragraph which opens his chapter on 'Village Life':

A charming downland village, with a wide expanse of the blue sea visioned from the top of the serene Downs; a downland village, devoid of any outward signs of poverty, of low wages and bad housing. Here the motorist or the superficial tourist, with eyes alone for the external beauty, would be amazed should you tell him that the people were living in a state of villainage under the rule of one or more tyrants, to whom they were beholden for their bread and butter as well as for the roof over their heads.⁸⁷

From the top of the Downs, the motorist or traveller sees the beauty of the countryside. But this alone is not the whole story; it enables only a falsifying look and a selective one. To go down means to hear about the Small Holdings Act, the Housing Act, the Insurance Act, to hear about exploitation of labourers by farmers and squires, to hear about forced

⁸⁵ Horace Horsnell, 'The Truth about Birds', *NS*, 12 July 1913, pp. 435-36 (p. 435). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

⁸⁶ F. E. Green, *The Tyranny of the Countryside*, rev. by Anon., *NS*, 12 April 1913, p. 29.

⁸⁷ F. E. Green, *The Tyranny of the Countryside* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1913), p. 51.

migration, and destruction of cottages; to go down, in other words, would entail not having 'eyes alone for the external beauty'. This is the world which the words of the Georgian poets and writers, and their literary allies like E. Nesbit, did not describe, the world they excluded and thus eliminated from their words.

1.5 Conclusion: Ruralism and Modernity

In the *NS*, the countryside is obscured and falsified. It is depicted as a space of escape, as a divorce from ugly city structures and social problems, a world 'out-of-the-world' where the traveller-writer can 'see' and appreciate beauty. When the observer does actually see humans, they are depicted as either idiotic country-folk, or as witches, ghosts, and maidens. The actual living conditions of country inhabitants are either ignored or obscured out of all recognition. This way of seeing the countryside is at odds with the Fabian social-problem-solving, collectivist enterprise. The front half of the *NS*, the political section, abounds with reports and essays on social investigations into actual lived conditions in rural areas: changes taking place on the land, the living conditions of farm labourers, unionisation of rural labour, rural depopulation, and so on.⁸⁸ For such Fabians, the country, like the city, was construed as a social and historical space, an area of living and working that needs to be investigated in the Sharpian mode. This contrasts radically with the invented country presented by the Georgian poets and their prose-writing allies, a vision that dominates the literary section of the journal. It is in fact a way of actively creating rural England in a particular way. What the process of selective seeing emphasises is that a rural myth was brought over from the cities and imposed on the country. As Alun Howkins has argued, in the period after 1880 the countryside came

⁸⁸ Until August 1913, there is no detailed treatment of aspects of country life in the review columns of the back half. This date is important since attached to the 2 August 1913 issue there is a more than 20 page 'Rural Reform Supplement' which deals with conditions of rural life. The supplement was the result of an investigation conducted by H. D. Harben, *NS* director and Chairman of the Land and Rural Problems Committee of the Fabian Society. It also included an extensive bibliography on 'Rural Conditions and Problems'. Some of the books listed in the reference section of this supplement were subsequently reviewed by the journal. To note just two: *How the Labourer Lives: A Study of the Rural Labour Problem*, by B. Seebohm Rowntree and his research assistant the poet May Kendall, reviewed in 23 August 1913 issue; and, *The Farm Labourer: The History of a Modern Problem*, by O. Jocelyn Dunlop, reviewed in 13 September 1913 issue. As indicated, the long reviews and treatments of the subject in the literary section of the journal came after the publication of the Supplement.

to be seen as ‘the essence of England, uncontaminated by racial degeneration and the false values of cosmopolitan urban life’.⁸⁹ This is part of an ideology of Englishness constructed as a reaction against urban degeneration and alienation, which becomes, after the Great War, ‘a permanent part of the national ideology’. It is for this England that British soldiers fought in the trenches of the Great War, as Rupert Brooke’s 1914 *NS* story (discussed below) testifies. Martin J. Wiener also identifies the increasing cultural dominance of this streak from the late nineteenth century onwards: a form of ‘rural patriotism’ which becomes in the hands of Tennyson (and many others) ‘a comfortable way of escapism for city dwellers’ and ‘a means of redefining “Englishness”’.⁹⁰

What starts off as a negative response to the city comes to define a whole national culture. Ironically, then, ruralism plays a role in national ideology in inverse proportion to its place in national life: a rural ideology for a predominantly urbanised nation. In stark contrast, an *avant-garde* movement like Futurism appears in economically and industrially backward countries like Italy and Russia; there, as Trotsky argues, it ‘obtained its most brilliant expression, not in America and not in Germany’. For Trotsky, Futurism exemplifies a phenomenon ‘which has been repeated in history more than once, namely, that the backward countries which were without any special degree of spiritual culture, reflected in their ideology the achievements of the advanced countries more brilliantly and strongly’.⁹¹ When Italy and Russian were looking forward through Futurism, England was looking backwards towards a pre-industrial past, to a more

⁸⁹ Alun Howkins, ‘The Discovery of Rural England’, in *Englishness*, ed. by Colls and Dodd, pp. 62-88 (p. 69). Next quotes is from page 82.

⁹⁰ *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 49.

⁹¹ Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1925; repr. London: Redworks, 1991), p. 158. See also Edward Timms, ‘Introduction: Unreal City – Themes and Variations’, in *Unreal*

simple, natural, and real time. Maybe this explains why Britain from 1890s onwards was so infatuated with Russian fiction of a predominantly rural bent, with Constance Garnett becoming the agent of what Squire described dubbed as ‘the Russian invasion’, a cultural importation on a magnificent scale.⁹² Isn’t that another form of response to the crisis of the city in Britain? The rise of Russian fiction and the discovery of the countryside appear to be part of the same historical process then, both cultural artefacts produced by the crisis of the metropolis.

For nearly a decade, Georgianism dominated the literary scene in Britain, a poetry where, as Edward Timms has argued, ‘there is scarcely a glimpse of city life, let alone an acknowledgement that both author and reader are living in a modern industrial society’.⁹³ The first *Georgian Poetry* anthology sold 15,000, and the second 19,000, copies. In his *NS* review, Squire championed it as ‘the best collection of the kind that has been or could have been published for decades’.⁹⁴ He proceeded to extensively publish many of the anthology’s contributors, such as Rupert Brooke, W. H. Davies, Reginald Ingram, M. D. Armstrong, Walter de la Mare, Gordon Bottomley, T. Sturge Moore. For a while, the *NS* becomes the home of Georgianism in Britain. Even when Squire was forced to abandon his insularity and engage with contemporary continental literature, he does so grudgingly. In the case of Marinetti, he publishes a disclaimer before ‘The Son of the Beggar of

City: Urban Experience and Modern European Literature, ed. by David Kelly and Edward Timms (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 1-12 (p. 2).

⁹² Solomon Eagle, ‘Books in General’, *NS*, 12 July 1913, p. 439. See chapter 5.

⁹³ ‘Expressionists and Georgians: Demonic City and Enchanted Village’, in *Unreal City*, ed. Kelley and Timms, pp. 111-27. Timms argues that English culture didn’t manage to generate a city literature to rival Expressionism in Germany.

⁹⁴ J. C Squire [as Solomon Eagle], ‘Books in General’, *NS*, 19 April 1913, p. 53. Squire used to write his editorial under that name. On 10 May, 1913, Squire explained the source of the name: ‘In response to inquiries, I may be permitted the personal explanation that Solomon Eagle is not my legally registered name. But, strange though it may be, there once was a person with the name. During the Great plague of London (the temporary, not the permanent) he perambulated the streets naked with a pan of burning coals

Love', stating that: 'We present the following translation of a poem by the Italian Futurist leader as an interesting specimen of the work of that school'.⁹⁵ The only continental literary contingent that *Squire* publishes quite regularly is Russian fiction, and even then there is a focus on the rural writings of Gorky and Chekov (see chapter 5). The other foreign contingent is Irish fiction, of a rural bent as well, like Michael MacDonagh's 'An Irish Vagabond', Padraic Colum's 'The Boy on the Road', or Susan R. Day's 'Dingle Races'.⁹⁶ Even though Irish *NS* fiction (like its Russian counterpart) was predominantly realist in description and outlook, it shared an essential ingredient of paramount importance for *Squire*: rural setting and a preoccupation with mother nature.⁹⁷

Expressionism, Futurism, and other European movements were on the whole not represented in the pages of the *NS* under *Squire*. But it is wrong to conclude from that that the *NS* turned its back on the city. This is simply not the case. Degenerate, ugly, and foul, the city was still seen and engaged with, even if as part of a predominantly rural, anti-industrial agenda. Stories on homelessness, malnutrition, poverty, unemployment, and work (though certainly not as dominant as Expressionism in Germany) were still written and published in pre-war Britain. Even hegemonic rural writing had to rely on

on his head crying "Repent, Repent". What better attitude could a sane man adopt? What became of him I forget. I think he died' (*NS*, p. 150).

⁹⁵ F. T. Marinetti, 'The Song of the Beggar of Love', trans. by Horace B. Samuel, *NS*, 10 May 1913, pp. 144-5. *Squire* also published Marinetti's 'The Pope's Monoplane', trans. by Horace B. Samuel, *NS*, 26 July 1913, pp. 499-500.

⁹⁶ 5 July 1913, pp. 402-404; 23 August 1913, pp. 626-8; 1 November 1913, pp. 115-6.

⁹⁷ As John Eglinton concluded his *NS* essay 'Irish Literature in the Nineteenth Century': 'Fortunately there is in Ireland something older than the Catholic Church, older than the Irish language, older than archeology, older even than the gods – Mother Nature herself, in whose presence the poet can forget the squalid animosities of race and creed, and the various contentious sobriquets – "West Briton," "Irish Irelander," and the like – which at times make him sick of the name of his country. The future of Irish literature is mainly an affair between the poet and this kindly mother, as she manifests herself to the solitary thinker on the hills and plains of Ireland' ('Irish Supplement: The Awakening of Ireland', *NS*, 12 July 1913, pp. 8-10 (p. 10)). The *NS* will later also publish Liam O'Flaherty's animal portraits (see next chapter).

such an engagement with city life, if only to prove its point about the splendours of the country. Country and city, Georgianism and urban realism, Fabian collectivism and ethical socialism, exist together and in contradiction to each other. Their opposition generates the cultural politics of the back half in 1913, a romantic patriotic ruralism in contradictory unity with an urban realism.

Chapter 2

Wartime Stories and Post-War Realities, 1914 - 1926

2.1 Introduction

In 1913, the *NS* sees the emergence of a definite literary urban pattern. There is a proliferation of short stories published on various aspects of *lumpenproletarian* and working-class existence. This socially engaged literature meditates on unemployment, the voluntary charity system, and adverse work conditions, and continues to dominate the literary section in 1914. This chapter is concerned with tracing the development of this literary genre and its disruption by the outbreak of the Great War, as well as critically assessing short stories published in the journal during the War and up to 1926. Especial focus will be given to the way the *NS* represented the War in fiction and the way it responded to the continuing and sharpening crisis of liberalism as it was reflected both politically and intellectually in the post-war period. 1926 will act as a breaking point because of the General Strike and its crucial (and somewhat neglected) cultural and political significance in British inter-war history. It is also the year when *NS* fiction comes into life again, suddenly revived after a period of decline and stagnation.

2.2.1 Pre-War Urban Pattern, 1914

Charity figures and philanthropic organisations feature in many 1913 pieces and continue to attract literary attention in 1914. The *NS* was particularly concerned with this contingent of society because it saw the whole charity system as an integral part of a *laissez-faire* economy. According to the Fabian conception of society, Liberal economic principles should be replaced with state-socialist management of the national resources and collective social provision for the poor and unemployed. There are a couple of short stories in 1914 that engage with the subject of charity head-on.

One such short story, written by Angela Gordon, is appropriately entitled ‘The Philanthropist’. The protagonist, Ishbel Ascroft, volunteers to work in a soup kitchen by taking her friend’s place for one lunch-time. As the title implies, Gordon conceives of ‘the philanthropist’ as a social type. She describes the volunteer’s perceptions of herself and of her social role. Ascroft, who had to tear herself away from many social engagements, arrives at the soup kitchen wearing a fur coat, ‘a watch set in diamonds’, and radiating with her ‘*comfortable consciousness of virtue*’:

She felt kind, good-tempered, and extremely sorry for the poor; it would be delightful, she fancied, to watch their wistful faces lighting up with gratitude as she ladled the steaming soup into their proffered jugs. It was so unpleasant to be hungry! Once, when she was staying at Mürren, she had lost the way during a long afternoon ramble, and had been more than two hours late for dinner, so that she understood the meaning of hunger.¹

Ascroft wants to feed the hungry because it makes her feel good. Feelings of superiority and moral goodness are an essential part of such a social equation. Empathy is also necessary. Ascroft even believes that the temporary delay of her dinner on one occasion

¹ Angela Gordon, ‘The Philanthropist’, *NS*, 10 January 1914, pp. 435-6 (p. 435). Emphasis added. All subsequent quotations are from p. 436.

justifies comparison with the hunger of the homeless, whose lives are a daily struggle for food and shelter.

And when 'the poor' fail to show the gratitude she expects, she (typically) feels 'hurt, indignant and disappointed', and goes on to resent the surrounding hideousness and sordidness: 'She began to dislike the poor, who took so much kindness for granted and had no manners. They were distasteful to look at, and their clothing had a most unpleasant smell'. The reality of the actual class encounter shatters her desired and sought-after sense of philanthropic altruism and upsets her 'consciousness of virtue': 'The milk of loving-kindness turned sour within her [...] They [the poor] had no individuality, no purpose in life, no claim upon destiny. Destiny, indeed, had plainly no use for them. It was improbable that they possessed separate souls. They were in fact hopelessly uninteresting'. Ascroft spares no thoughts for asking how this poverty was created and why the soup kitchen is so busy. Her encounter is individualised. She finds herself in an upsetting situation, feels resentful and then ashamed, and at the end concludes that: 'It was not her fault if the world was badly managed. She had worked hard for a whole hour, helping the poor and miserable'. If only society was properly managed, she wouldn't have to go through this ordeal. This conclusion works well with the Fabian anti-charity agenda, which Gordon would have certainly been aware of. Politically read, the story makes the case for the liberating potential of good management (or collectivisation) for both philanthropists and the poor.

This is the first short story in the *NS* that looks at the impact of charity on the 'charitable' and not on the needy. It examines the givers' thoughts and feelings about voluntary provision for the poor. The story implies that the philanthropic bourgeoisie,

unable to ignore poverty, are finding both their role as agents of charity and their direct encounter with the poor increasingly disturbing. The story ends with class separation, with Ascroft sitting beside her fiancé in a velvet chair at the Bechstein Hall listening ‘luxuriously to Beethoven, Opus Ninety-seven’.

Provision for the poor is also the subject of Theodosia Lloyd’s East End short story, ‘“For this Relief Much Thanks”’, which, uniquely, narrates both sides of the philanthropic equation. Lloyd’s short story portrays Mrs. Hardman’s struggle against poverty and her quest for more funds, and also presents the Board of Guardians’ efforts to accurately means test her. Mrs. Hardman feels that it would be impossible to survive if the Board decides to take away her food tickets after discovering that she had been reunited with her husband and has been ‘benefiting’ from the extra money he brings home. The committee members feel that Mrs. Hardman is not ‘open’ enough and wonder whether she is telling the truth, operating on the deeply-entrenched assumption that the poor are conniving and will do everything to get more charity. One administrator even ventures to summarise their relationship to the poor: ‘“us all trying to give as little as we can, and *they*, the poor I mean, trying to get as much as they can”’.²

Lloyd depicts the bureaucratic structures and social organisation invested in administering the Poor Law, and describes the social relations that it produces. Compared to Gordon, Lloyd sees charity as a social issue and not in terms of an individual’s crisis of conscience. The story deals with a different aspect of the charity system in such a way that individual actions of characters take on a social dimension somewhat lacking in

² Theodosia Lloyd, ‘“For this Relief Much Thanks”’, *NS*, 5 December 1914, pp. 222-4 (p. 223). Lloyd was, from 1911, the wife of Charles Mostyn Lloyd, Fabian, journalist, and academic. Lloyd was a full-time organiser for the National Committee for the Prevention of Destitution, headed by the Webbs; head of the Department of Social Science and Administration at LSE; and, assistant editor of the *New Statesman* from

Gordon's piece. As a result, the workings of a whole system of charity are being represented. Though Lloyd does not venture an opinion on whether there exists an alternative to this way of providing for the poor, her story (like Gordon's) educates the bourgeois reader on the current charity system and the social friction it generates. Unlike 'The Philanthropist', no Beethoven notes sound at the end, and the story ends with Mrs. Hardman being comforted by her friend after losing her food tickets.

A playlet also relevant to this theme was contributed to the *NS* by the Irish playwright St. John G. Ervine. 'Compensation' deals with the issue of adverse work conditions and injuries at work, a problem also addressed in the literary section in 1913. It features three characters: a Claim Assessor, a Workgirl, and a Junior Clerk. All three remain unnamed in order to stress the social dimension of the encounter. The playlet is set in the office of the Accidental Injury Insurance Company, a company which settles claims with injured workers under the Workman's Compensation Act.³ It dramatises the attempt of the Workgirl to receive a just compensation for an injury she sustained when a case of beer bottles fell on and disabled her arm. The Workgirl is very young, and ignorant of the claim procedure. By selectively reading from the medical report, the assessor is able to intimidate her and downplay the seriousness of her injury. There is no process of negotiating a settlement, as the play illustrates how the assessor, after having estimated the claim for what seems to be a permanently damaged arm at £5, uses all his class power (position, language, doctor's evidence) to bully the girl into accepting an

1921, effectively editing the journal from 1926 until Kingsley Martin's appointment in 1930 (See Adrian Smith, 'Lloyd, Charles Mostyn' (1878-1946) in *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vol 7).

³ St. John G. Ervine, born in Belfast, WW1 Lieutenant in the Royal Irish Fusiliers, had worked as a clerk in an insurance office before becoming drama critic for *The Observer* (1919-1923). He was also a friend of Shaw and close to the Georgians, dedicating his novel *Changing Winds* (Dublin: Maunsell 1917) to the memory of Rupert Brooke. For more biographical information see entry by William M. Tydeman, 'St. John

unjust compensation. Indeed, she ends up receiving a tenth of what she believes she is entitled to.

In the *NS*, workers' problems are objects of literary (as well as political) concern. As I argued in the 'Realities of the Working City' section in the previous chapter, this is part of a pattern initiated with the foundation of the journal. What is clearly an important assumption in this structure of feeling is that workers are helpless in the face of employers. The absence of Trade Unions to mediate between workers and bourgeois institutions is always noted. The fact that in 'Compensation' the Workgirl goes through the whole compensation procedure on her own is of great political significance, illustrating that there is nobody to safeguard her rights. Ervine significantly omits to mention the role that Trade Unions were actually playing at the time in fighting for better conditions at work.⁴ This helps explain why most *NS* characters at this time are depoliticized. The working class as a political force actively engaged in changing its own conditions of labour is left un-represented. It will take the post-war era, and the changes that it brings, for the working class to emerge as an active agency in *NS* fiction.⁵

G. Ervine', in *Reference Guide to English Literature*, ed. by D. L. Kirpatrick, 2nd ed., 3 vols (London: St. James Press, 1991), I, pp. 542-3.

⁴ When St. John G. Ervine does treat the issue, he presents Unions as scheming, money-grabbing organisations. See his 'Sunday Morning', *NS*, 6 September 1913, pp. 689-90.

⁵ For more on the social and political power of organised labour see the post-war section of this essay.

2.2.2 J. D. Beresford's Clerks

The pressures of working life on the lower classes and the social philosophy that such conditions generate also receive literary treatment in 1914.⁶ J. D. Beresford's 'The Escape' meditates on a clerk's analysis of his own emotional and social condition. The short story opens with: 'Albert Higgs was beleaguered by all the circumstances of his life'.⁷ After much trouble and strain, the word that he finally finds to describe his own condition is 'Beset'. For the last ten years, Higgs 'had been braced to the struggle, and resistance had become a habit with him': 'Nothing had ever gone right' (p. 83). At work, although a meticulous clerk, others 'had been promoted over his head' and the manager had accused him of being too slow (p. 83). His house in Golden Oak Road was 'without doubt the worst house in the road, and an altogether disproportionate amount of his spare time was occupied in looking after it' (p. 83). His marriage was hardly a success. He felt that his wife was 'careless about vital things' and 'could not realise the importance of method and accuracy either in house work or cooking' (p. 84). It also seemed to him that his worries were steadily increasing and that he was mainly preoccupied with countering and resisting new difficulties:

He was in no way daunted; he had no intention of relaxing his immense fight with adverse circumstances for a single instant, but he felt that it was very hard that he of all the men should have been thus singled out for perpetual persecution. (p. 84)

⁶ 1914 also brings a short story by John Freeman on casual labourers in the city entitled 'The Travellers' (14 March 1914, pp. 722-3) which describes the continuous search for workhouse places. Angela Gordon's 'Mrs. Trubshaw' (14 March 1914, pp. 723-4) describes the life of a servant, a subject also treated in 1913 by Charlotte M. Mew in 'An Old Servant' (18 October 1913, pp. 40-41). The new leisure facilities used by the working class are described in Gerald Cornish's 'At the Pictures' (31 January 1914, pp. 530-31) which ends with the protagonists's grandmother comparing silent films unfavourably with older modes of leisure: ' "In my time pore folks *was* pore folks," she said; "they wasn't always reading novels from free libraries and going to the theatre and wearing smart 'ats and blouses. You leave that to them as 'as money for it," she said, "pleasure's not for you and me. It all comes along o' this 'ere eddication, and Lord knows what else beside" ' (p. 531). These short stories testify to the *NS*'s readiness to respond to quite diverse working-class experiences at the time.

⁷ J. D. Beresford, 'The Escape', *NS*, 25 April 1914, pp. 83-5 (p. 83). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

Beresford draws an elaborate picture of a besieged clerk trying to hold his own in adverse conditions and pressurising circumstances.

On his arrival from work one day, Higgs collapses in bed with influenza, unable to see to mending the kitchen pipes and too weak to attend to other household problems. He falls asleep and dreams of escape, hence the title of the piece. He dreams of ascending towards the galaxy while gazing down towards earth, like Walter Benjamin's angel of history whose face is turned towards the past while being propelled towards the future. While Benjamin's angel sees 'one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet'⁸, Beresford's clerk is equally pessimistic and sees futility, monotony, and ugliness. While gazing down, he sees how his house becomes fused with other houses in the neighbourhood, forming an indivisible whole: 'They were all alike, all equally ugly and with the same defects, and little figures moved about them, some satisfied and careless, others anxiously attempting useless repairs' (p. 84). The clerk's journey ends with an invocation of the abyss, with earth waning, the sun eclipsed, and the moon vanishing into the abyss – a vision of loss and emptiness. So if Benjamin's angel is left with wreckage, Beresford's clerk disappears into the void. History as destructive progress (dialectics) as opposed to history as an ascent into the abyss (nihilism).

Beresford sees Higgs's worries and suburban problems as profoundly connected to his profession. His attempts at perfectionism at work and his continuous striving (or toil) to improve his living conditions are part and parcel of clerkdom. He has lower-middle-class problems that perpetuate themselves because he can only afford lower-

middle-class solutions. Although Beresford sometimes risks caricaturing a whole profession, his story vividly represents the laboriousness, worriedness, and social anxiety of clerkdom.⁹ Importantly, in Beresford's imagination, the clerk perceives his struggle for existence as an individual effort, which explains the story's nihilistic ending: the clerk recognises the futility of struggle. He resigns himself to believing that his action is of no consequence. He feels alone and helpless in the face of what he believes are all-powerful forces.

Unlike 'Escape', though, Beresford's next *NS* short story does allow room for hope and change. But it is change through individual promotion, an exceptional separation from conditions that still predominate in clerkdom. 'The Ashes of Last Night's Fire' deals with the promotion of an unnamed clerk to the position of department manager. This event is described in striking language. The clerk moves away from 'common routine', from the 'usual evening papers, the usual pipes and cigarettes... the usual remarks on the weather' to the unusual, to life: 'To-night his body, his mind, his whole soul was open to new impressions. His dry veins had become miraculously fruitful of racing blood. He was a god in a wonderful garden that breathed the exquisite scent of syringa'.¹⁰ The clerk brakes through the limits set on his feelings, thoughts, and aspirations, and feels liberated. Beresford describes him as someone who hated being a clerk, never mixed with other clerks, and had 'not a single friend among them'. His promotion is portrayed as a matter of leaving his class behind, literally. He moves up a

⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), pp. 245-55, p. (249).

⁹ Clerks have received extensive literary treatment in early twentieth-century culture and were memorably represented by E. M. Forster (*Howards End*) and H. G. Wells.

¹⁰ J. D. Beresford, 'The Ashes of Last Night's Fire', *NS*, 6 June 1914, pp. 274-5 (p. 274, p.275). The following quotation is from p. 275.

class and characteristically turns against his 'inferiors'. There is no change in clerkdom, only a run-away clerk has been reported.

2.2.3 New Representations of the Country

1914 also sees the introduction of a significant new development in writing on the countryside. As I have argued earlier, 1913 witnesses the growing influence of the Georgian poets and their literary allies. Their published work in the journal portrays the countryside as a place of ramblers and literary travellers, who talk to ghosts and witches and run into 'idiotic' country-folk. This view of the countryside is clearly contested in the back half in 1914.

In one of the little, out-of-the-way villages that W. H. Hudson so adored, Montague Fordham writes on how the Workers' Education Association is busy discussing social history in 'The History of the English Villages' class. 'New Life in the Village' transmits the villagers' great interest to 'discuss questions which came so near to their lives'.¹¹ Farm labourers are excited to find that education can relate to their daily life. Unlike the false Georgian ideas of rural life, Fordham significantly sees the countryside as a historically changing social space.

Class features strongly in this different way of looking at the countryside. Elizabeth Holt's 'Peter Grows Up', a 1914 story, depicts the poverty of a farm-labouring family. Peter, the main protagonist, works after school, poaches, and does everything he can to help out his foster parents. The crisis of the story centres around Peter being hit by

¹¹ Montague Fordham, 'New Life in the Village', *NS*, 10 January 1914, pp. 434-5 (p. 435). Fordham's interest in agricultural labour led him to write *The English Agricultural Labourer 1300-1925: An Historical Sketch* (London: Labour Publishing Company, 1925). Fordham was a Cambridge law graduate, Director of

his foster-mother on the day the Local Government Board inspector happens to visit. The inspector sees the marks on Peter's legs and immediately accuses Mrs. Caulder of neglect and ill-treatment, and prepares to take the boy away. Peter resents the inspector's attitude: 'He only knew that this interfering person was trying to upset his life, was treating him as a thing to be taken or left at her pleasure'.¹² He resents the fact that an outsider has the power to routinely 'study' him and his surroundings and pry into his affairs. The encounter with the inspector also portrays the class dimension of the exchange:

The inspector's voice was insolently patronising, but Mrs. Caulder did not notice it. She was used to being spoken to so by the gentry, among whose ranks her visitor's clothes securely placed her. It raised, indeed, in Mrs. Caulder a certain unconscious resentment, which made her manner towards her self-styled "betters" a trifle defiant, but she never dreamed of putting it into words even to herself. (p. 466)

The same class intimidation performed on Ervine's workgirl in 'Compensation' is practised on Mrs. Caulder.

Additionally, knowing Peter's importance to the household economy, Mrs. Caulder worries greatly about losing him, especially with the 'baby comin' an' all' (p. 467). Peter realises that his foster-mother was wrong to have hit him. He fabricates a story about being hit by a boy from the village and lets her off the hook. He feels needed and depended upon by the family. At the end, Peter affirms his independence; and after the inspector's departure he addresses his mother in the following terms:

"You got no business to 'it me," he said, "but she ain't got no business to come 'ere takin' me away. I ain't 'ers to take. I'm- I'm me own. Nex' time you 'it me I'll go away myself. But I won't be *took*. I'll stay 'ere as long's I like, an' I'll go when I like. An' *she* can go to 'ell." (p. 467)

Arts and Crafts Gallery in London (1899-1908), and, importantly, lecturer on social and economic problems (1907-1914). (See *Who Was Who* CD Rom Version).

¹² Elizabeth Holt, 'Peter Grows Up', *NS*, 17 January 1914, pp. 466-67 (p. 466). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

In comparison to E. Nesbit's way of looking at the countryside, of literary-travelling narrators who roam the countryside extracting precious secrets from local inhabitants¹³, 'Peter Grows Up' is a significant diversion. Seeing the countryside as a place of social problems and class encounters that deserve literary treatment is an important 1914 development. It is therefore quite significant that the first account of the Great War comes from the countryside. Fordham's 'War and the Village' deals with how new wartime changes affect a small village community: selling horses to the government, recruiting soldiers, buying provisions, and preparing to administer for casualties, are among many urgent home-front preparations described by Fordham.¹⁴

¹³ Country superstitions and sympathetic male travellers are only a few of the literary tropes used by Nesbit in her two 1914 *NS* short stories: 'The Secret Medicine', 21 March 1914, pp. 752-4; 'The Cherub's Head', 4 April 1914, pp. 819-21.

¹⁴ Montague Fordham, 'War and the Village', *NS*, 15 August 1914, p. 593.

2.3.1 Fiction of the War, 1914-18

As the fiction already discussed demonstrates, the literary section was greatly engaged with the wider social and political spheres. Social problems of class, of poverty, of charity, preoccupied the back half. *NS* fiction also responded to changing historical and political realities. With the declaration of War, the literary section begins to engage with the war effort abroad and at home. It proceeds to examine war ideologies, and to provide war accounts, which appear together with short stories dealing with war issues.¹⁵ This is not to suggest that the war completely dominates the magazine's literary publications; there is still room (but less frequently) to treat class issues, the countryside, and other literary themes. In the following analysis of the war period, I will examine the *NS*'s dominant concerns, and assess other important divergent literary formations, some of which continue the development of older, pre-war patterns.

It is important to note from the beginning that an immediately felt effect of the war on the literary section of the *NS* is a drastic decline in the number of short stories published. It would be safe to say that more stories were published in 1913 and 1914 than 1915-1920. For example, sixty short stories were published in 1913 compared with six in 1916. This decline in fiction contributions is concurrent with a numerical decline, although less drastic, in essays, long reviews, and non-fiction prose pieces.

While Fordham's villagers had been preoccupied with war preparations, Rupert Brooke conveys his friend's thoughts on hearing the deceleration of war. 'An Unusual Young Man' tells of a literary-minded bourgeois individual sitting on a hill in Cornwall and thinking about the implications of a war with Germany. He finds himself reminiscing

about Germany and remembering the happy occasions he shared with German friends.

He feels he is being coerced to break a mental habit of associating Germany with pleasure:

A thousand little figures tumbled through his mind. But they no longer brought with them that air of comfortable kindliness which Germany had always signified for him. Something in him kept urging, "You must hate these things, find evil in them".¹⁶

The protagonist also awakens to the realisation that war will mean 'the change of everything he knew': music would be neglected, he wouldn't be able to camp out anymore, the Russian Ballet wouldn't return, and some of his friends might be killed. The changes that he anticipates give him a 'feeling of ignorant helplessness' (p. 639).

Yet, the idea of England being attacked sickens him. He associates 'England' with 'holiness'. But what sort of 'England' is it that stirs in him 'the triumphant helplessness of the lover'? 'Grey uneven little fields, and small ancient hedges rushed before him, wild flowers elms and beeches, gentleness, sedate houses of red brick, proudly unassuming, a countryside of rambling hills and friendly copses' (p. 639). The Southern Country (Cotswolds, Wiltshire) features strongly in his depiction of England, typically so for a Georgian. When he leaves for London at the end of the story, the implication is that he goes in order to join up.¹⁷

Seemingly innocent, this is in fact a very disarming piece: it begins by acknowledging the social and cultural links with Germany and ends by affirming the potency of English nationalism and the inevitability of joining up. Brooke's friend at no

¹⁵ For example, J. M. Hone examines the pan-German school in his 'Germanist Theory', *NS*, 26 September 1914, pp. 734-5; and, Desmond MacCarthy contributes an article entitled 'Nietzsche and the War', *NS*, 10 October 1914, pp. 13-4. War accounts are detailed below.

¹⁶ Rupert Brooke, 'An Unusual Young Man', *NS*, 29 August 1914, pp. 638-40 (p. 639). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

time conveys any understanding of what war is like or has doubts about whether he should be endorsing it at all. Indeed, Brooke's short story is in line with the *NS*'s political policy on the war. The journal far from adopted a pacifist stance and broadly supported the government in waging war. The *NS* at the time was not in favour of conscription (held as an infringement of civil liberties) and approvingly declared that the figure of the volunteer epitomised the things the country was fighting for.¹⁸ Brooke's patriotism and his implied willingness to volunteer would have been exactly what the journal wanted to endorse. In fact, as Brooker and Widdowson argue, Brooke comes to epitomise patriotic English ruralism: 'As the "golden-haired," Rugby and Cambridge educated poet-athlete and poet-soldier, he combined the ruling-class values with which Britain entered the war, giving expression to both the sense of pastoral England as "Home" and the readiness for self-sacrifice in the service of a nation at war'.¹⁹

1914 ends with an essay contributed by May Sinclair on Red Cross Chauffeurs, and 1915 has 7 accounts written by Desmond MacCarthy detailing his activities with the Red Cross.²⁰ The first short story set at the front and published in the *NS* came from Jeffery E. Jeffery nearly one year into the war.²¹ 'Henry' describes the narrator's impression of a French soldier serving at a prisoners of war camp. The short story is

¹⁷ Brooke himself joined up and died in 1915 at the Dardanelles at the age of twenty eight. His *NS* obituary was written by a great admirer of his poetry: J. C. Squire (1 May 1915, pp. 85-7).

¹⁸ Adrian Smith, *The New Statesman: A Portrait of a Political Weekly, 1913-1931* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), p. 87. For a detailed assessment of the political section's reporting of the war see chapter 5: 'Common Sense about the War: The *New Statesman*, 1914-1918', pp. 69-115.

¹⁹ Peter Brooker and Peter Widdowson, 'A Literature for England', in *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920*, ed. by Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 116-63 (p. 121).

²⁰ May Sinclair, 'Chauffeurs at the Front', *NS*, 26 December 1914, pp. 295-6. MacCarthy's accounts appeared between 20 February and 1 May 1915. They are also reprinted as 'With the Red Cross 1914-15' in 'During the War' section of his *Experience* (London: Putnam, 1935), pp. 199-225. Interestingly, MacCarthy's accounts become increasingly interested in describing his own social adventures and encounters to the detriment of reporting on the wretchedness of war, an issue which receives remarkably little attention.

²¹ Jeffery E. Jeffery, 'Henry', *NS*, 24 July 1915, pp. 374-5.

surprisingly calm. There is no mention of the imprisoned, and Henry's behaviour and rituals are described in great detail. The story ends with the unexplained release of the narrating-officer and the wish that Henry will be reunited with his family.

'Henry' was also reprinted in a collection of short stories and war accounts that Jeffery published during the war. *Servants of the Gun* covers events ranging from the journey to the trenches to various war experiences at the front. Reading through the collection one realises that 'Henry' is less of a 'war' story compared with other front pieces. 'A Battle', for example, describes 'the doings of one particular unit during a fortnight's continuous fighting. It is in no way an attempt to describe a battle as a whole [...] Thinking things over now, in the quiet of a well made dug-out, I realise that the predominant impressions left upon my mind, in ascending order of magnitude so to speak, are: dirt, stink, horrors, lack of sleep, funk – and the amazing endurance of men'.²² The *NS* could also have published 'A Battle' but was satisfied to remain with a depiction of a different, more pleasant, side to the war.²³ This is not to suggest that 'A Battle' is more 'valid' as a war experience than 'Henry', but merely to draw attention to the relationship between (literary) editorial policy and the manner of representing a social phenomenon. By selecting 'Henry' for publication, the *NS* sought to represent front activity in a certain way. This attitude to the war is also discerned by Smith in his analysis of the political section. He argues that contributors to the political section 'lacked motivation to convince the public of the Western Front's real horrors' and were

²² 'A Battle' in Jeffery E. Jeffery, *Servants of the Gun* (London: Smith, Elder, 1917), pp. 76-97 (p. 97).

²³ Jeffery began to publish his war short stories in the *NS* (the journal also published one of his short stories before, and one after, the war). The fact that *Servants of the Gun* was completed in November 1916 (as the preface shows) indicates that the *NS* could have published some or even all of the war short stories that were reissued in the collection, but didn't. Subsequently, Jeffery seems to have found the *Cornhill Magazine* more congenial, and it proceeded to publish all his war short stories prior to their appearance in

not interested to report on the depressing and distressing side of the war.²⁴ The remainder of this section will examine whether the *NS*'s literary half continued to prefer the 'Henry'-type short story.

'Resting' is another calm short story from the front. The opening passage sets the dominant perspective on the war: 'The little village was slumbering under the hot September sun. Occasionally the silent air shook with heavy reverberations of the big guns northward. Otherwise all was still'.²⁵ The guns and cannons are too far off to worry or threaten; they only provide occasional background noise on a Sunday afternoon when 'peace lay on the countryside' (p. 183). The story describes the brief stop a French regiment makes beside the narrator's camp: 'A few unintelligible raucous orders, rifles were stacked, packs unshouldered, and the men set free for three whole hours, their first taste of real holiday for half a year' (p. 183). The piece is mainly concerned with the 'activities' of the resting soldiers; no memories of warfare are recalled here. There are references to fighting and images that signify the distress of war, but there is no detailed description of fighting: 'And over the whole drifted an odour; a smell of dirt of unchanged clothes, of days and nights in the sweltering trenches, of sweat and, perhaps, of blood. It came and went, this warm, heavy scent of the dressing-room; the behind-the-scenes smell of the drama of war' (p. 183). Trench activity remains behind the scenes: it provides the silent (silenced) background of 'Resting'.

the collection. Only in 1921 does the *NS* accept another of Jeffrey's short stories for publication, to which I will return in the post-war section.

²⁴ Smith, *The New Statesman*, p. 73.

²⁵ Herbert Wright, 'Resting', *NS*, 27 November 1914, pp. 183-4 (p. 183). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

It is noticeable that, at the end of 1915, the bias towards treating and emphasising the congenial, unrevolting aspects of war is temporarily challenged. 'After Loos', though set in a field hospital and not inside the trenches, is as close as the reader of the back half is allowed to get to the horror of trench warfare. The story describes the activities of the R.A.M.C. orderlies and narrates some of the stories heard from the Walking Wounded on their way back from the front trenches. Representations of war as hostility and confrontation, as blood and death, are communicated and disclosed by the memories and accounts of soldiers wounded in the trenches: 'What terrors are here [the dressing station] laid to rest by cheerful words, dangling limbs supported, clean bandages re-applied! Patients smelling of blood and soil look with frightened, or weary, or proud eyes at their wounds. They groan and tell again their adventures, or grow indifferent with long-borne pain. But all are grateful'.²⁶

Loos was part of the failed offensives carried out on the Western Front in autumn 1915. 'After Loos' describes the events of September, two months before the operation was called off. As one historian wrote: 'The balance sheet was grim. The Allies made no gain strategically or even on the most limited scale; there had been simply useless slaughter'.²⁷ The fragments that make up the story attempt to narrate Loos. Importantly, the short story addresses issues of experience, narration, and representation. The difficulty, even near impossibility, of accurately narrating the war front and describing atrocities and needless slaughter is acknowledged by the writer. He implies that trench warfare can only be properly understood and communicated by being experienced; narration cannot adequately represent such a complex web of experience:

²⁶ 'After Loos', which is strangely signed 'P.H.E.B.', was published on 25 December 1915, pp. 279-80 (p. 279). Further references are given after quotations in the text..

But it is just this power of self-compensation possessed by the human mind that makes a true tale of war impossible. No recording instrument is more inaccurate. Here are men returning to contribute to public opinion at home, but even as they go they are themselves changing, returning through various emotional states to the normal. Whatever their experiences, their true thoughts, have been, they are even now beyond a magic circle and cannot be truly communicated. Hence the shroud and halo over the fields of battle. (p. 279)

By making the claim that the war ‘cannot be truly communicated’ the narrator is in danger of saying that war is unrepresentable, constructing it as a horrific experience beyond the reach of human communication. How then can you challenge its legitimacy or undermine it if you don’t understand it, if it’s beyond your comprehension? Imperialist slaughter dwindles away into metaphysical horror. Saying that war is a catastrophe so great is the same as saying it is no catastrophe at all since in both versions its discernable material dimensions (its structure and agents) are lost, and with that the moment of criticism is also lost. How is it possible to criticise a phenomenon shrouded in silence? Having argued for the impossibility of true communication, however, the narrator still goes on to document some of the accounts he has heard. Interestingly, he still attempts to lift the shroud enveloping the battle fields; he still attempts to represent the slaughter, even if from a detached distance. The struggle and effort to represent remain of paramount importance here.

Even though there were some constraints on the substance of military reporting in the political section, one would expect that after such an honest (though limited) attempt to narrate trench experiences the literary section would have continued the search for ‘truer’ or ‘closer-to-the-truth’ trench accounts. 1916 bears no such marks. ‘After Loos’ is not only an exception to the dominant way of representing the war, it also signals the temporary cessation of literary engagements with war issues. Remarkably, during the

²⁷ A. J. P. Taylor, *The First World War: An Illustrated History* (London: Penguin, 1966), p. 99.

most intense and most horrific trench warfare experienced in the Great War, there is a near absence of war stories and war accounts from the back half, a silence which lasts for more than a year and is only broken in June 1917.²⁸

Why didn't the *New Statesman* address or report on the war in the literary half from the beginning of 1916 to mid-1917? Why was the War actively excluded from the journal's fiction? One can argue that the journal's preconceived images and ideological conception of war were severely shaken by the events of 1916. The fact that conscription was introduced by Lloyd George early in the year upset the journal's image of the soldier as Brooke-like volunteer, heroic and sacrificial. Additionally, by 1916 it became clear that the war wasn't going to be 'over by Christmas', as the majority had thought at the beginning of the war. The question that needs to be addressed is: did the political and military developments of 1916 impact on or change the *NS*'s representation of the War?

The Somme, 1 July 1916, certainly contributed a lot to transforming the conception of modern trench warfare. Its actual and symbolic value lies in consolidating a new, more realistic conception of the Great War. War came to be seen as deadlock, wasteful and futile, and as a long, drawn out (even endless) affair. In the following, A. J. P. Taylor conveys the change to the imagery and reality of war epitomised by the Somme:

Idealism perished on the Somme. The enthusiastic volunteers were enthusiastic no longer. They had lost faith in their cause, in their leaders, in everything except loyalty to their fighting comrades. The war ceased to have a purpose. It went on for its own sake, as a contest in endurance. Rupert Brooke had symbolised the British soldier at the beginning of the war. Now his place was taken by Old Bill, a

²⁸ At this time Arnold Bennett became a shareholder in the *NS* Company and started to contribute regularly to both halves. He also discussed the journal with the editors on a weekly basis in order to be updated with and wield influence over the editorial line or policy. It thus seems that Bennett's anecdotal memories published as 'Relaxation from the War' (20 May 1916, pp. 158-9.) signposts the beginning of an actual period of relaxation from treating the war, which clearly suited acting-editor J. C. Squire's jingoistic ruralist agenda.

veteran of 1915, who crouched in a shell crater for want of 'a better 'ole to go to'. The Somme set the picture by which future generations saw the First World War: brave helpless soldiers; blundering obstinate generals; nothing achieved. After the Somme men decided that the war would go on for ever.²⁹

The Somme thus exemplified on a grand scale an existing and growing pattern of slaughter and wastefulness. While more than half a million soldiers directly experienced and felt the impact of the Somme, the *NS* marginalised it and undermined its significance; it continued to boost public morale in order to maintain support for the war effort, as its response to the senseless slaughter shows: 'What is of much greater importance is that we should constantly remind ourselves that territorial gains, great or small, are no measure at all of success or failure in what the Allies are now attempting to do [...] To bring as great a force as possible of the enemy into action, to hold him there, and to deplete his reserves is not merely the chief object of the Allied offensive in the west; it is at present its sole objective'.³⁰ Even though the journal's conception of war as a short affair, a matter of teaching the Hun a lesson, was difficult to sustain or defend in 1916, the truth about the War was, effectively, concealed and countered with ideological falsifications of political and military reality.

What could the *NS* publish at times like these, when Henry himself, as it were, died on the Somme? Maybe there weren't any more 'safe' 'Henry'-like short stories to publish in 1916 and the journal sought to block out competing conceptions or representations of the war, possibly resembling 'After Loos'. Or it could have been that

²⁹ Taylor, *First World War*, p. 140.

³⁰ This quote is taken from 'The Battle of the Somme', a copy of which has been posted on the *NS* website under Twentieth Century Statesman (www.statesman.co.uk).

after December 1915 the journal was only sent post-Loos literary treatments of the war which it refused to publish?³¹

Essentially, the effect of 1916 and the Somme on the literary section of the *NS* is registered in an absence: the Somme was excluded from the back half. Patriotism was served best by ignoring, and thus marginalising, the slaughter, in order not to undermine public morale. The journal, as Smith argues about the political half's reporting of military activities and operations, preferred to be seen as presenting and 'embracing this illusory, unreal world of cheerful Tommies impatient for another crack at their quivering foe'.³² Crucially, the literary section responded by completely ignoring the war for one and a half years. By adopting this policy, the *NS* tactically prevented the publication of articles and contributions from people outside its ranks and editorial team, and responded to Loos and the Somme by 'relaxing' from the war. This was certainly a strategic relaxation, an active falsification of reality.

Literary attention to war issues is re-introduced to the back half by Ward Muir's 'The Blind Man's Home-Coming' nearly a year after the beginning of the battle of the Somme.³³ The 1917 batch of short stories treats both home and war fronts. 'The Blind Man's Home-Coming', which recommences the treatment of war issues, is set on the home front and describes the journey made by an orderly escorting a blind soldier to his home in Yorkshire. The story is part of many observations made by the writer Ward Muir while working as an orderly in the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth during

³¹ Whatever the internal dynamics that caused this absence, such an absence is certainly in line with the journal's general policy of supporting the war effort.

³² Smith, *The New Statesman*, p. 74.

³³ Ward Muir, 'The Blind Man's Home-Coming' *NS*, 2 June 1917, pp. 206-8.

the war. His war-hospital reminiscences were published in various books, the main collection being *Observations of an Orderly* which included a 'A Blind Man's Home-Coming'.³⁴ Although humorous aspects of the soldiers' rehabilitation process are recounted in Muir's stories, he also emphasises the permanent social and individual damage inflicted by the war through his treatment of wounded soldiers.

In 1917 there was no return to the gruesome description of trench warfare exceptionally (though indirectly) recounted at the end of 1915. The two war-front short stories published in 1917 tend to present aspects of the war effort untreated by the previously published war accounts. They also emphasise the great sense of loss felt at this stage of the war, whether experienced as physical or human loss, or seen as wasted, futile human effort. 'Guides in the Dead-Hole' tells of a time early in the war 'before the Salient yielded pride of anguish to the Somme'.³⁵ The narrator, who is given a tour of the war-zone by the legendary surviving ninth Town Major of Ypres, describes what he sees of the city, the 'most dangerous corner in Europe' (p. 303). The loss of human life is read off the damage inflicted on the architecture and buildings of the city: 'Her [Ypres] delicate face is battered and smashed beyond any repair her ancient pride could suffer [...] remembering that for every eyesore within her ramparts there is a disfigured face in England, for every treacherous wall there a hobbling cripple here, and for every broken home a home here that is broken too' (p. 303). The narrator feels that looking at the destroyed city may bring him closer to understanding the suffering undergone by soldiers

³⁴ Ward Muir, *Observations of an Orderly: Some Glimpses of Life and Work in an English War Hospital* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, 1917). The NS also published another of Ward Muir's short pieces: 'Dad', 18 August 1917, p. 472. This piece was reissued in another of Muir's war collections entitled *The Happy Hospital* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, 1918). Ward also managed and edited a hospital magazine entitled *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital*, which included some of his work and regularly published contributions from hospital staff and wounded soldiers.

there. Here again the wartime struggle to understand others' experiences and anguish is recounted. The narration ends with the effort to decipher human suffering from the city walls: 'I long to walk, slowly and alone, in case something should happen even now to grant me one inkling of all that they went through' (p. 303). Subjected to heavy German shelling, Ypres was completely destroyed by the end of the war.

The process of recklessly endangering soldiers' lives is described in Brian Buxey's 'The Staff: A Narrative', which details the way in which a regiment plans to infiltrate enemy territory, cross their trenches, and photograph some form of earthwork that military intelligence is keen to investigate. After gathering the necessary volunteers, the raid is meticulously planned, safely performed, and the photos successfully taken. To the great fury of the commander of the operation, it is later found that the films they were given were previously exposed and no pictures could be developed. Forty men could have died for nothing: 'Naturally, this trifling detail of staff-work could in no way diminish the intrepid pluck and skill of the Forty volunteers for death, each of whom had taken a hundred-to-one chance of returning from the expedition'.³⁶ Needless to say, since no photographs could be developed, the men were neither rewarded nor honoured for their action. This cynical piece attempts, in a roundabout way, to convey to the reader the wasteful and futile aspects of war, maybe even hint at a new feeling of demoralisation in the army.

The narrators of both 'The Staff: A Narrative' and 'Guides in the Dead-Hole' sound more resigned to destruction and wastefulness than keen on presenting or exposing

³⁵ E. W. H 's 'Guides in the Dead-Hole', *NS*, 30 June 1917, pp. 302-303 (p. 302). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

³⁶ Brian Buxey, 'The Staff: A Narrative', *NS*, 15 September 1917, pp. 566- 7, (p. 567).

the experiences of the trenches, a mood also conveyed in a poem entitled ‘After the Battle’:

‘We only want to take our wounds away
To some shy village where the tumult ends,
And drowsing in the sunshine many a day,
Forget our aches, forget that we had friends’.³⁷

These short stories were the last to be published in the *NS* about the war until Armistice Day celebrations in November 1918.³⁸ Overall, the *NS*’s war record was one of unquestioning patriotism and untarnished loyalty to the war effort. By selectively representing and strategically ‘relaxing’ from the war, the journal upheld and defended the ideological forces activated to falsify the reality of war.

2.3.2 Fiction and Social Reality

During the war, alternative literary formations to the prevalent structure of representing and narrating the war also received literary treatment and attracted critical comment. Literary-social exploration and the widespread concern for the social life of workers and ‘casuals in the city’ in the literary section of the *NS* of the early, pre-war years were boosted and reinforced by a critical review, and several short stories, published during the Great War. This section aims to explore and analyse the significant wartime survival and, even, development of this specific pre-war pattern.

³⁷ A. P. H., ‘After the Battle’, *NS*, 30 June 1917, p. 303.

³⁸ In line with the *NS*’s endorsement of the 1917 Balfour Declaration promising the Zionists a home in Palestine, the journal provides an extract from the diary of a Jewish officer serving in the English Army describing his feelings on entering Jerusalem in June 1918: ‘Passover in Jerusalem’, 11 June 1918, pp. 212-3. For a detailed examination of the *NS*’s Zionist tendencies and its general policy on the Middle East, see Khalid Kishtainy’s pioneering study *The New Statesman and the Middle East*, Palestine Essays, no. 29 (Beirut: Palestine Research Centre, 1972).

In 1916, Sidney Webb, founder and chairman of *NS* Company, expressed the need to appreciate literature as sociologically valuable material. The observation and registration of social environment (as well as ‘human nature’) he regards as an important characteristic of literature. Literature, according to Webb, should also help us understand ‘human relationship and social environment in a particular place’, ‘the ways of everyday life, the “social scenery” at a particular period’, and ‘the habits of life and speech of a particular social stratum’.³⁹ Webb indeed advocates what he sees as the ‘descriptive sociological’ value of literature:

It is time that a stand was made on behalf of the value, as scientific material, of works of fiction. The novel – taken in bulk and scientifically digested – affords stuff in the nature of descriptive sociology far more valuable than the elaborate collections of newspaper cuttings to which Herbert Spencer applied the term. (p. 546).

‘Ireland in Fiction’ is a review of Stephen J. Brown’s annotated bibliography of Irish fiction, and Webb greatly admires the knowledge of Irish social life that Irish fiction imparts. He feels that Ireland can be known better from its novels than from London’s Parliamentary Blue Books:

It seems as if every part of Ireland, every period of Irish history, every stratum of Irish Society, every industry or occupation of the people who live in Ireland, every phase of their character and every contour and shade of colour of the scenery amid which they live, must be represented in the couple of thousand novels thus analysed and annotated. (p. 546)

³⁹ Stephen J. Brown, *Ireland in Fiction: A Guide to Irish Novels, Tales, Romances and Folk-lore*, rev. by Sidney Webb *NS*, 11 March 1916, p. 546-7. (p. 546). Further references are given after quotations in the text. I have extensively quoted from this piece because of its importance to what can be termed as the journal’s literary ideology, and the rarity of finding a piece documenting Sidney Webb’s critical and theoretical views on literature. Treatment of this piece is surprisingly lacking in a book dedicated to assessing Fabian attitudes to culture: Ian Britain, *Fabianism and Culture: A Study in British Socialism and the Arts 1884-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); as is, incidentally, treatment of Squire’s ‘Socialism and Art’ discussed earlier.

Following Brown's work, Webb advocates the creation of an English annotated bibliography that is sensitive to the specific locality depicted in fiction, and one 'classified according to the social strata and industrial tissue described' (p. 547).

It is one thing to say that literature has sociological value, but quite another to classify literature according to its 'descriptive sociological' characteristics or the sociological information that it imparts. The concept of a literature having sociological value is distinguishable from having a specific kind of literature actively depicting social life and as such prone to be sociologically marked, as for example the literature of the sea, of London City, of clerks, or of the factory.⁴⁰ It seems that for Webb only literature that has discernible 'descriptive sociological' characteristics can have sociological value. Webb has a limited definition of the relationship between literature and sociology. Thus, the literature that Webb has in mind is a specific kind of literature: one that tends to be seen as describing what life is like in a certain place, a specific profession and social environment. It is a literature from which specific sociological data/information can be extracted, a literature that Virginia Woolf selectively interpreted and attacked scathingly in her 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown'. Webb draws attention to Arnold Bennett's *Five Towns* and Sir Walter Besant's *London* novels as examples of fiction dealing with human life and its social environment, a fiction of 'descriptive sociological' value.

The 'sociological' literary category can be elucidated by referring to similar classifications used by Webb's fellow Fabian and chief reviewer of novels on the *NS* from 1914-1918, Gerald Gould. In his book about the novel, mainly based on his reviews from the *NS* and *Saturday Review*, he divides literature into categories and assigns representative figures to each category: biographical (Compton Mackenzie),

psychological (James Joyce, and D. H. Lawrence), and sociological (H. G. Wells), etc.⁴¹ According to the conception of literature offered by Gould's classifications and Webb's review, 'sociological' fiction would play a pivotal role in the aforementioned annotated bibliography.

Sidney Webb's set of assumptions about literature helps explain the pervasive presence in the pages of the *NS* of what he would perceive as 'sociological' fiction, or fiction of 'descriptive sociological' value: J. D. Beresford's short stories about clerks, Charlotte M. Mew and Angela Gordon's pieces on servants, and stories about 'casuals in the city', factory workers, and various others treating the East End charity system. All these Webb would have classified according to place and profession and included in his annotated bibliography of English fiction. The literary engagement with human relationships and social environment, and the depiction of social life in the literary section constitute an important part of the *NS*'s literary ideology, certainly in the pre-war years.

Wartime also witnesses the publication of short stories perceived to have sociological value. At the beginning of 1916, the *NS*, curiously, publishes a short story by the Russian writer Alexander Kuprin, essentially characterising a deeply-felt and personally experienced consciousness of class. Admittedly, this period did witness extensive translation of Russian writers. An increasing amount of critical attention was paid to analysing the works of Tchekov, Gorki, Dostoivesky, Tolstoy, and Turgenev, most of whom (excluding the last two) often appeared in translation in the *NS*.⁴² Kuprin,

⁴⁰ Needless to say, being labelled as such is no indication of literary value or quality.

⁴¹ Gerald Gould, *The English Novel of To-Day* (London: John Castle, 1924).

⁴² In 1916 only, there appeared in the *NS*, for example, a review by Robert Lynd, the famous *NS* essayist, of John Middleton Murry's *Dostoevsky: A Critical Study* (2 September 1916, pp. 518-19); another essay on

however, was not one of the canonical figures usually published or discussed in the journal; he was not part of the journal's Russian team. 'The Defence of the Accused' was his only *NS* short story, published probably for its unrivalled sociological and historical qualities. Its sensitivity to the minutest of social detail is unique.

Briefly, the story, narrated in unbroken monologue, opens with: ' "I admit, my lords, I murdered him! [...] I murdered him with a sane and clear memory. I murdered him conscious of the end, convinced and cool, without the slightest regret, or fear or hesitation. Were it in your power to raise him to life again, I would repeat my crime" ' .⁴³ The action takes place in a courtroom, and the whole piece is the expression of the accused's confession/defence. The narrator describes how he had been followed and haunted every moment of his life by the victim, whom he met in art exhibitions, galleries, and operas, and on the tip of the mountains overlooking the sea at night. The narrator provides the court with a detailed description of his victim's social habits and features. The accused describes his victim's favourite opening phrases, his methods of argumentation, and the gossipy manner with which he discusses literature. The agonized narrator reveals how the victim has ' "killed the best moments of my life" ' and ' "dishonoured and made ludicrous and vulgar everything I held dear, loveable and

Chekov by Lynd, reviewing some of Constance Garnett's translations, and entitled 'The Perfect Story-Teller' (18 November 1916, pp. 159-60); on the theme of translating from Russian, a piece entitled 'A Study in the Untranslatable' (signed J. W.) reviewed Mme. N. Jarintzov's *The Russians and Their Language* (26 August 1916), pp. 495-6. The ongoing engagement with Russian literature yields an interesting essay in 1917 by Leonard Woolf on Chekov's particular (and limited) kind of realism, which Woolf sees as part of the writer's successful attempt to control his sense bewilderment from/towards life ('Tchehov', 11 August 1917, pp. 446-8); the treatment of the great is continued by another essay on Tolstoy entitled 'The Supreme Russian', by Havelock Ellis (22 September 1917, pp. 590-91, which argues that Tolstoy 'has been the greatest moral force which has appeared anywhere in the world since Rousseau' (p. 590). See chapter on Russian fiction for more examples.

⁴³ Alexander Kuprin, 'The Defence of the Accused', trans. from Russian by Alex Bakshy, *NS*, 22 January 1916, p. 374-6 (p. 374). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

touching” ’ (p. 375). The narrator comes to realise that it is indeed a social phenomenon he is describing:

“He had numberless images and faces, this torturer of my soul, but always remained the same. He assumed the likeness of a professor, a doctor, an engineer, a woman-doctor, a barrister, a girl-student, a writer, a wife of the registrar, a landowner, a Government official, a passenger, a visitor, a guest stranger, a playgoer, a reader, a neighbour in the country. In my earlier days I was stupid enough to believe that these all were separate beings. But he was one.

The bitter experience of life at last disclosed to me his name. He was the Russian ‘intellectual’, the would-be educated man of the middle classes”. (p. 375)

The narrator is enraged by the ubiquitous nature of the Russian intellectual. He ends up murdering a schoolmaster in a train carriage after the latter lies to him by saying that the seat beside him was taken when it really wasn’t, and then proceeds, to the horror of the accused, to reprimand his own son for lying: ‘ “he who lies can steal and commit a murder, and even betray the Tsar and his country” ’ (p. 376). The narrator is enraged by the hypocrisy. After the schoolmaster wonders at the narrator’s interfering behaviour and commits the mistake of calling *him* an intellectual – (‘ “The Hangman called me a hangman” ’ (p. 376)) – the narrator, fuming with rage, shoots the schoolmaster.

This hostility towards the rising middle-class intellectual may be attributed to Kuprin’s general scorn for the Russian urban literati.⁴⁴ Significantly, Kuprin in this short story draws a connection between the rise of a class fraction, its social habits, and its ideology. He also explores the connection between individual attitudes and shared social behaviour. Kuprin conceives of fiction, and the practice of writing, as actively and consciously engaging with the social world. His greatest cultural achievement lies in his ability to depict in fiction historical phenomena and social experiences that have bearing

on society as a whole. Luker greatly admires these characteristics of Kuprin's fiction and argues in his conclusion that: 'Kuprin was a writer of lived experience par excellence, and it is his constant focus on details of actuality that lends his work its convincing power. His lifelong conviction that art should be fused indissolubly with reality explains the irritation and even hostility he felt toward contemporaries who ignored or denied that fusion'.⁴⁵ For Kuprin, social and artistic materials are inherently connected.

J. D. Beresford is another *NS* writer who treats the individual in his social environment, and explores the relation between the individual and social class. Importantly, Beresford, confusedly takes on the new ideas of Freud and brings the notion of psychological type into his literary pot, using it to determine an individual's political views and to construct the notion of 'social type'. In his 'The Introvert' he states 'that a new scheme of classification, such as that provided by psychoanalysis, is altogether too fascinating to be resisted'.⁴⁶ His 'introvert', David Wince, 'suffers from a kind of spiritual agoraphobia that makes him scared and suspicious of large generalisations, broad horizons and cognate phenomena' (p. 32). His marriage, habits of talking, opening sentences when arguing, and loathing of shopping are all presented and dissected by the narrator. In politics he looks for sincerity and is a conscientious Radical, W. E. Gladstone being his hero. Beresford's introvert is a dying breed: 'If he survives the war, the coming of the New Democracy will certainly finish him' (p. 32). His personal behaviour, social attitudes, and political beliefs are linked to his psychological classification.

⁴⁴ For more information about Kuprin's attitude towards his fellow intellectuals see Nicholas J. L. Luker, *Alexander Kuprin*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), p. 17. Curiously, there is no mention of 'The Defence of the Accused' in Luker's book. Next quote is from p. 154.

⁴⁵ Luker is referring to Kuprin's dislike of the Symbolists and Decadents around the turn of the century.

David Wince dreads meeting the 'extrovert', Beresford's counter type: 'My friend is, in fact, the perfect type of what is known to psycho-analysts as the extrovert. He has never questioned himself, never doubted the infallibility of his gospel, never known fear'.⁴⁷ He is confident, patriotic, and proud of the Empire, and has denounced Home Rule, Reform of the House Lords, Education Bills, and Old Age Pensions. Associated with land, and having some interest connected with the Stock Exchange, the 'extrovert' is clearly a Tory supporter. The narrator speculates that the loudness with which he declares his political views and social doctrine may signify the loss of power this type used to exercise in government. The link between mannerism, social habits, political ideology, and psychoanalytic type is again made here.

These two Beresford short stories can be set apart from others in the *NS*'s pattern of social exploration, even from his own short stories in 1915 when clerks were the dominant characters. As I argue below, they are far too concerned with applying psychological theory to fiction. These two pieces constitute instances when sociology and psychology overpower the fictive imagination, when the practice of fiction becomes solely concerned with testing psychological and social doctrines. To invent, to write fiction, in order to vindicate new theories would not have gained Webb's approval, since in his essay he clearly states that literature is used by the researcher merely to provide sociological material yet is not invented for sociological purposes: 'to learn how to use

⁴⁶ J. D. Beresford, 'The Introvert', *NS*, 12 October 1918, pp. 31-2 (p. 32). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

⁴⁷ J. D. Beresford, 'The Barrage: A Study in Extroversion', *NS*, 31 August 1918, pp. 433-4 (p. 434). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

fiction, like an exquisite fossil in road material, for a purpose other than that for which it was invented'.⁴⁸

Beresford's two short stories were also reissued in a collection, which he furnished with an 'Author's Advice', his practical advice to a budding author, detailing how it is possible to live off fiction. Predictably, and in classical naturalist strain, Beresford prescribes the employment of social type for its value as a literary tool: 'Characterisation must be subsidiary and achieved briefly by such a story as this. The best way to do it is to hit a type that can be easily recognised'.⁴⁹ His utilisation of literature to explore psychological categories and social types has been criticised by Virginia Woolf. In her *Times Literary Supplement* review of his novel *An Imperfect Mother*, which appeared on 25 March 1920, Woolf denounces what she sees as his abuse of fiction with psychoanalytic theory: 'Judged as an essay in morbid psychology, *An Imperfect Mother* is an interesting document; judged as a novel, it is a failure'.⁵⁰ She concludes by declaring Beresford's characters to be inadequate individuals: 'Mr Beresford has unduly stinted his people of flesh and blood. In becoming cases they have ceased to be individuals'. Indeed, Beresford is at variance with Kuprin over exactly this point: the conception of the individual in society.

Compared to Kuprin's engagement with social reality, Beresford here presents a utilitarian approach to literature, more sociological than imaginative. Sidney Webb, in his essay on fiction, argued for the importance of a literature based on sociological matter

⁴⁸ Webb, 'Ireland in Fiction', p. 546.

⁴⁹ J. D. Beresford, 'Author's Advice', in *The Imperturbable Duchess and Other Stories* (London: W. Collins, 1923), pp. v-xii (p. xi). The stories in the collection were written between 1911 and 1921.

(probably resembling Beresford's clerks stories), not a literature that seeks to justify the latest social and psychological theories. There are important distinctions to be made between Beresford and Kuprin's depiction of social reality. While Kuprin presents social forces operating through an individual, for Beresford the individual is abstracted into a symptom of a social type. Kuprin presents the individual in society, Beresford attempts to explain society through psychological types. Kuprin explains the links between the behaviour of an individual, and the social attitudes and values of an emerging class fraction. His art expresses social, lived experience; Beresford's art is contained within sociological categories and idealist classifications.

It is clear that 'sociological' literature is an uneven construct. Direct engagements with social reality and lived experience vary in quality and cultural significance. Yet, the pursuit of the links between literature and social reality and its treatment in the fiction of the *NS* are a constituent part of the journal's literary concerns. Clearly, the journal was very concerned with exploring the links between literary imagination and social reality, fiction and society, literature and lived experience. Gordon, Kuprin, and Beresford indeed all have one striking feature in common: their pre-occupations with 'type'. 'Type', though utilised in various forms and with various degrees of 'pre-determination', comes to bridge the gap between the individual on the one hand and society on the other. Gordon's Ascroft stands in for the Philanthropist, Beresford's clerks stands in for clerkdom, Kuprin's victim is 'the Russian intellectual'. Though at times it does mean that, as in Beresford, individuality is sacrificed for social generality or psychological category, leading to passivity or fatalism, one of its main advantages is to be able to draw

⁵⁰ Virginia Woolf, 'Freudian Fiction' in *A Woman's Essays, Selected Essays*, ed. by Rachel Bowlby, 2 vols (London: Penguin, 1992), I, pp. 21-3 (p. 22). Next quote is from page 23.

conclusions about society or social forms at large, to be able to utilise fiction to criticise society. The following sections will continue to trace the *NS*'s literary ideology in the politically uncertain and socially strained times of post-war England.

2.4 Constructing the Post-War World

In 1915, Desmond MacCarthy, the post-war literary editor of the *NS*, published a short story entitled ‘The Old Master’, which traces the impact of the war on an old humanist thinker. The master, as the narrator refers to him throughout, has collected in his study various samples of the great ancient civilisations: Venus statues, Egyptian Gods, and a bust of Homer are displayed. The master has a humanist library to match his ancient ornaments: ‘The library was composed of only two kinds of books: well-attested masterpieces in all languages and of all ages, and a choice collection of the most extravagant examples of human enthusiasm and aberration’.⁵¹ In this congenial environment, being surrounded by what he perceives to be the best that human civilisation has to offer, the master fails to find inspiration to write. He finds that he can think of nothing else but his childhood and the war. He thinks of refugees, ‘miserable people lugging, that very moment, their children and bundles along frozen roads, with pictures behind their eyes of charred homes’. He is deeply affected by these scenes and realises that all his life he has been preaching what amounts to one lesson – the importance of pleasure in life:

His message was that man was a little creature, and if he would only be humble enough to know that pleasure was good enough for him, and learn that his troubles came from turning up his nose at the gifts of that good Goddess, mother of all arts, all would go well [...] It needed only a little detachment and the folly of the world became a spectacle hardly painful, even subtly flattering, to one who looks on.

The practice of detached wisdom (and ‘to see folly everywhere and forgive it’) had proved to be influential and helped to persuade a whole generation to forgive folly. As a result of the war, and in the face of such devastating human suffering, he finds himself

⁵¹ Desmond MacCarthy, ‘The Old Master’, *NS*, 20 November 1915, p. 160.

unable to tolerate his old wisdom of detachment, and continuously struggles to write in new ways, attempting to tackle man's folly head-on and without pity.

This piece is immensely important because it acknowledges the permanent damage inflicted on liberal-humanist thought and European civilisation by the First World War. Liberalism and 'the values and institutions of the liberal civilisation' were in a state of collapse.⁵² It is this realisation that MacCarthy's story is grouping towards, a realisation of failure: ' "So this is how I used to write about the struggles and catastrophes of the past," he thought, " My God, how much I have left out" '.

The implication here is that old ways of thinking, feeling, and writing are limited and fail to account for new realities brought about or sharpened by the War. Only through new ways of looking and writing can these changes be accounted for and narrated. Importantly, MacCarthy does early on acknowledge the transformative experience of total war. This section aims to examine how *NS* short stories represented and constructed the post-war era during the period leading up to the General Strike in 1926.

The post-war era is characterised by conflict between two competing social forces: one acknowledging the urgent need for continuing change, the other wanting to return to, and uphold, pre-war standards. Charles L. Mowat in his history of inter-war Britain argues for the importance of understanding the post-war era in terms of the dynamics of stability and change: 'Any analysis of the condition of Britain in the twenties must take account of these two characteristics: stability, more evident in some part of the national scene than others, but never absent; and change, intruding everywhere,

⁵² Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), p. 109. Chapter four is dedicated to the 'Fall of Liberalism'.

particularly in material conditions, but never all-triumphant'.⁵³ The war generation called for far-reaching social and political change to accommodate new post-war realities, while the older generation was looking for stability and 'normalcy'.⁵⁴ The general feeling among the emerging generation was that of 'a dawning recognition [...] of the fallibility, even culpability, of their elders'.⁵⁵ Admittedly, the struggle for change tends to be understood and interpreted as a conflict between different generations: a conflict between new and old, in which the politics of blame feature strongly. The conception of conflict as generational is made strikingly clear in a short story by Jeffery E. Jeffery (issued in a 1920 collection) where a young LSE student, as it happens, attacks the old generation, its perception of change as threat, and its 'rotten structures':

"Briefly we believe that it is not only possible but imperative to substitute co-operation for competition, peace for strife, kindness for malice, and the prosperity of the community for the profits of the selected few. Your system has broken down. Dare you look at the world to-day and deny that it has? Then in the name of humanity give ours a trial. You have had your chance and failed. The future does not belong to you but to *us* and we claim the right to shape it for ourselves".⁵⁶

⁵³ Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between The Wars: 1918-1940* (London: Methuen, 1956), p. 202. Mowat also states that social change was manifested and expressed more in literature than in politics, where the old generation remained firmly in the saddle (p. 201).

⁵⁴ This is, of course, not to imply that the forces of change were formed solely as a consequence/result of the war. Most of the social and political forces and conflicts of the post-war era had strong roots in Edwardian England (the Votes For Women campaign is only one important example).

⁵⁵ John Lucas, *The Radical Twenties: Aspects of Writing, Politics and Culture* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 1997), p. 39. This is an important book about the 1920s, dealing with canonical, and some less studied, writers of the period. It is, however, mainly concerned with bourgeois (social and political) radicalism and fails to adequately address working-class narratives of the 1920s, leading the reader to falsely conclude that resistance and opposition to the dominant culture came predominantly (even solely) from bourgeois quarters.

For working-class fiction in the 20s see H. Gustav Klaus, ed., *Tramps, Workmates and Revolutionaries: Working-class Stories of the 1920s* (London: Journeyman Press, 1991). Klaus recovers and re-circulates material written by marginalised working-class authors of great importance to the cultural historian of the period. Curiously, although it was published several years before Lucas's *The Radical Twenties*, Lucas fails to take the material uncovered by Klaus into consideration in his assessment of the decade.

⁵⁶ Jeffery E. Jeffery, 'A Tap At the Door', in *Side Issues* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1920), pp. 231-48, (p. 244).

The First World War is seen as epitomising the failure of the old generation and the bankruptcy of its dominant liberal ideology. Jeffery's protagonist believes that his generation has a better 'system' to offer society, a better alternative to competition, profit, and malice.⁵⁷ This argument is also put across in Jeffrey's *Breaking Point*, his diagnosis of the dire post-war condition in Britain. As G. D. H. Cole suggests in his foreword, Jeffery does suggest a way out:

Mr Jeffrey concentrates on the simple truth that, wherever we look, we find statesmen making the world safe, not for democracy, or for any form of civilisation, but for general bankruptcy and starvation. At the same time, he points out that we have before us, if we are men enough to take risks, rather than submit to the certain, if gradual, destruction of our social system, a great opportunity of reorganising our civilisation on a better basis. He puts a plain choice before his readers, and it is a choice which under the existing conditions every citizen is called upon to make.⁵⁸

In a short story published in the *NS* a few months later, Jeffery seems less confident of the success of the new. 'On His Way Home' speaks of loneliness, disappointment, and frustration. It also expresses what Mowat describes as 'restlessness and unease about the future'.⁵⁹ Having experienced, and been changed by, the War, the protagonist (a civil servant) finds his old friends at the Division Dinner Club nauseating. He resents spending his evening listening to 'silly speeches' glorifying 'the great deeds of the immediate bloody war':

He had no wish to remember the past. Curse their reminiscences! Why couldn't they discuss the future? Much *they* cared for that. Blind, blind – why couldn't they see that the world was changing; that while they babbled of old

⁵⁷ In the concluding piece of the collection, entitled 'Confessional: By Way of Epilogue', Jeffrey states that: 'I cannot rid myself of the conviction [...] that those "others" who, in the unctuous phrase of our times have "made the supreme sacrifice" have been shamefully betrayed' (p. 254). He thus refuses to 'carry on': to carry on believing in the necessity of war and the infallibility of Empire.

⁵⁸ G. D. H. Cole, 'Foreword', in *Breaking Point* by Jeffery Eardley Marston (London: Leonard Parsons, 1921), pp. 5-8 (pp. 7-8). This book is written under Jeffrey's real name.

⁵⁹ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, p. 203.

days, the New Day was about to dawn? The future was pregnant with Hope, was in travail.⁶⁰

Additionally, the unnamed civil servant has plans for his own future and that of his profession. He hopes to write the authoritative book on the Civil Service entitled *Ideals of the State Service*, for which he had already been gathering information and conducting investigations: 'But he was looking beyond his own immediate prospects as a Civil Servant, looking out towards a future wherein his profession would have to be revolutionised to meet the imperious needs of a more enlightened community' (p. 363). He feels content in the knowledge that he is constructing something which will be of use to society at large in the future.

These thoughts brewing in his head, he refuses his friends' invitation to spend the night in the company of prostitutes. On his way home he accidentally meets the woman of his dreams, the one who epitomises the word 'Love' for him. In an ironic twist of events, when he attempts to confess his great admiration to her, he finds he is welcomed with: ' "Good evening, dearie," [...] "Coming home with me? It's quite close here." ' (p. 364). Having had 'his dream castle crash down in ruin', he goes home with the prostitute.

Interestingly, his energy for constructive change and his forward-looking orientation are undermined by the ending; he ends up doing exactly what his friends wanted him to do. Although he had felt confident that his friends' world was no longer his own - 'He was above it and beyond it, had dug the weeds out of his soul and planted ambition there' (p. 363) - his productive powers and ambition fail to be reaffirmed at the end; instead, he gets himself entangled with the weeds of the past. The reader is left to conclude that belief in social change has been frustrated. This, though, as I will argue

⁶⁰ Jeffery E. Jeffery, 'On His Way Home', *NS*, 3 July 1920, pp. 363-64 (p. 363). Original Italics. Further

below, is not the case in other spheres of social activity, away from London clubs and bourgeois dilemmas.

In the years immediately succeeding the war, the return to militant industrial activity and labour resistance to worsening conditions of work greatly pre-occupied the, by then, heavily unionised workforce. The continued expansion of trade-union membership in wartime Britain had great social and political reverberations in the post-war world. In his social history of inter-war Britain, John Stevenson shows that organised labour in the post-war era had become a force to reckon with:

The war also had major effects upon the position of organised labour. Trade-union membership had been growing rapidly in the years prior to the war, reaching just over four million by 1914. The war saw an acceleration of unionisation, the number of those belonging to trade unions rising from 4,145,000 in 1914 to 6,533,000 in 1918.⁶¹

The participation and representation of trade unions in ‘government, public authorities and arbitration tribunals’ during the war also demonstrated their growing strength and influence on social and political matters. Significantly, the greater visibility and prominence of organised labour in social life, and its increasing political importance, had a decisive impact on the literary half of the *NS*.

Early in 1920, and for the first time in the history of the literary section, the *NS*’s dominant way of representing the working class (as passive, in need of bourgeois charity and assistance, and having their conditions of living and working dictated by overpowering forces) is challenged. This was achieved through the introduction of the

references are given after quotations in the text.

⁶¹ John Stevenson, *British Society 1914-45*, (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 85. Next quote is from p. 196.

work of R. M. Fox to the back half of the journal.⁶² A working-class thinker, socialist, and graduate of Ruskin college, Fox was then just beginning to formulate his analysis of contemporary industrial capitalism, published in 1928 as *The Triumphant Machine: A Study of Machine Civilisation*, when 'Factory Life' appeared in the *NS*.⁶³ This piece thus marks a significant deviation from the journal's dominant conception of the working class.

Aware of the readership's bourgeois misconceptions, Fox seeks to remedy their false understanding of 'factory life'. Fox, who worked for ten years as a semi-skilled factory worker, speaks as a representative of his class, speaking from and for it. He clearly believes that factory workers 'are a growing factor in our social life' and that '[i]t is time that they are understood', and states: 'I write with the purpose of making them understood'.⁶⁴ Fox intends to inform the reader of the 'high-toned literary reviews' about life in the factory – 'I will take you into the workshop with me' (p. 547) – and offers to elucidate the processes and conditions of labour.

One of the first things he mentions after 'The bell rings for us to commence work' (p. 547) is the great value workers attribute to the existence of unions in the workplace, stating that non-unionised labour constitutes a threat to union members: 'The men cannot afford to have non-Unionists in the shop. They are a source of weakness. Conditions which have been fought and struggled for, which have involved suffering and sacrifice to

⁶² Richard Michael Fox (1891-1969) is not to be confused with the communist writer Ralph Winston Fox (1900-1937) who died in the Spanish Civil War.

⁶³ *The Triumphant Machine* was prefaced by H. N. Brailsford, socialist journalist, editor of *Labour Leader* (organ of Independent Labour Party), and chief leader-writer on the *New Statesman and Nation* in the 1930s. The publishers of the book were none other than the high priests of Bloomsbury, Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, who, in 1930, also published Fox's collection of working-class short stories entitled *Drifting Men* (1930) and, in 1937, his autobiography, *Smoky Crusade*.

⁶⁴ R. M. Fox, 'Factory Life', *NS*, 21 August 1920, pp. 547-8 (p. 547). Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from p. 548.

secure, are jeopardised by non-Unionists'. Fox explains that: 'The non-union shops are hell. Each man is suspicious of the other. Each works for himself. There is no unity, and only weakness'. Unions protect the individual worker and struggle to improve the conditions of work in the factory at large: 'The struggle to reduce rates and to force them up is always going on between the management and the men [...] It would be chaos and hell if the non-Unionists came in'.

Essentially, the struggle between organised labour and management is over control of the labour process and conditions of work. Management is always trying to force and coerce workers to perform certain jobs in certain ways and within specified times, while the workforce is actively resisting such impositions. At the time of Fox's writing, such management strategies were especially harsh as a result of the theoretical development of 'Scientific Management', a strategy intent on devising the working processes and tasks in such a way as to increase production and profit and to eliminate, so called, inefficiency and waste. At the heart of this authoritarian conception of work is the 'task idea': 'The task idea is the principle that the task of each worker should be determined in advance by management, which specifies not only what must be done but – in the minutest detail – how it should be done'.⁶⁵ This process of effectively seeking to transfer control from workforce to management was also noted by Fox: the figure typifying for him such dynamics in the workplace being the '“rate-fixers” or “feed and speed” men, who walk round and time jobs'. The 'rate-fixer' supervises the work and walks round with a stop-watch trying to determine whether a particular job can be

⁶⁵ Wendy Hollway, *Work Psychology and Organisational Behaviour: Managing the Individual at Work* (London: Sage, 1991), p. 14. Written by an Organisational Psychologist, this book traces the history of Industrial Psychology from Taylorism and 'Scientific Management' to the present day. For an interesting debate between Taylor and the unions about 'Scientific Management', see pp. 21-27.

performed faster, ultimately fixing the fastest possible time as the standard average to be adhered to by all. Needless to say, 'rates' were always a ground for conflict between management and workers. According to Fox, such workplace dynamics result in industrial warfare and, even, class war:

The system develops aggression all round [...] This is how the system operates. The conflict between the operative and the "rate-fixer" expresses itself in a continual irritation. A class war is talked about in the books, but that is a theoretical abstraction. There is nothing abstract about this. It is practical, actual conflict. It is brutal, primitive war over minutes and half-minutes. The milk of human kindness does not enter in. It does not apply.

Fox believes that these industrial conditions have produced a certain type of worker, with a certain kind of psychology. Naturalist type is again invoked to explain social phenomena. Management's endless attempts to control and dehumanise the process and conditions of labour has institutionalised industrial warfare and created what Fox labels 'a machine proletariat':

A machine proletariat has been developed. They are hard, narrow, logical, irreligious, uncultured; keen on material things, indifferent to spiritual values. They jeer at idealistic appeals. Life expresses itself to them as a conflict of Power. Life is Power. They are down because the other side have the power to keep them down. They will remain down while this is so.

According to Fox, factory workers will have nothing to do with middle-class morality, religion, and the Brotherhood of Man social philosophy because they fail to connect with their lives. Their social philosophy and outlook on life are determined by their ongoing struggle to improve their conditions of work and existence. In the face of capitalist brutality and intensified exploitation, workers seek to possess power: 'The factory workers are uniting to get power. To them it is a problem of power alone. No sentiment, no morality, no idealism – just power opposing power'. Fox ends the piece with: 'What will happen?'.

The 1920s were marked by industrial unionism's struggle against worsening conditions. For a decade that would bring the General Strike, Fox is a prophet of continuing industrial warfare and class antagonism. He charts for the readership of the *NS* the sharpening conflict between oppositional forces anticipated to clash in the national arena. As the following section argues, ironically, the next important date in the history of the literary section is indeed 1926.

2.5 Conclusion: The ‘MacCarthy Era’

1920 brought Desmond MacCarthy to the literary editorship of the *NS* after J. C. Squire left to edit, with the assistance of Edward Shanks, the monthly journal the *London Mercury*. It is always difficult to assess an editor’s term of office. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern an editor’s dominant way of selecting contributors. Although somewhat puritanical in temperament, Squire proved to be a highly successful literary editor of the journal since its foundation in 1913, using his position to nurture a group of Georgian poets and writers who were later to be termed ‘the Squirearchy’. His Georgian bias was clear in his selection of fiction and poetry. Yet, he was no fundamentalist at the time, and his socialist inclinations also led him to publish socially committed literature of immense importance to the journal, stories meditating on the connectedness of literary imagination and social reality, fiction and lived experience. Additionally, his literary section was always engaging and interesting, having most influence as a publisher and reviewer of *English* literature, though maintaining a lively interest in Russian realist fiction while also publishing samples of the European avant-garde. Indeed, Squire’s interest in everything old and English was noted by Beatrice Webb, even though it was still an emerging strain which hadn’t fully blossomed into the reactionary politics of the *London Mercury* later on. In her diary Webb wrote admiringly but critically of Squire, stating that: ‘He hates the destruction of anything which has charm or fine tradition; he is in fact a conservative of all that is distinguished because it is old: old faiths, old customs, old universities, old houses and, last but not least, old books [....] He has always been delightfully kind to the Webbs, but I fear he regards us as sadly limited in our interests

and utilitarian in our tastes'.⁶⁶ As I argued earlier, his infatuation with Georgian poetry is certainly a form of English traditionalism, an invention of country life as the ultimate source of community and value in England.

Although wartime saw a general decline in publishing, felt across the spectrum of literary journalism, Squire managed to keep the literary half engaged with what remained of the literary scene. His legacy to MacCarthy was a journal serious about cultural production, sensitive to the social and political value of literature, and highly respected in literary London.

Even though MacCarthy assumed control in a period when literary modernism was consolidating its hold on English culture, the post-war boom of literary activity was hardly noticed in the literary section of the *NS*. In fact, MacCarthy's literary editorship can be seen as a period of decline in the history of the literary section. In terms of fiction publishing, the 'MacCarthy era' was a period of stagnation; a period when the literary section was haphazardly edited, lacking consistent and coherent literary and critical standards. The only two significant short-story writers who contributed several short pieces to the journal at the time were Liam O'Flaherty and Austin Clarke. O'Flaherty, for example, acting on the advice of Edward Garnett, sent the *NS* the following four realist portraits on animal behaviour, which mark an important stage in the journal's changing 'fictive' attitudes to the countryside, gradually moving from Romantic evocation to realist depiction: 'The Cow's Death' (30 June 1923), 'Blood Lust' (4 August 1923), 'The Black Mare' (3 November 1923), 'The Wild Sow' (26 April 1924).⁶⁷ Predominantly,

⁶⁶ *The Diary of Beatrice Webb: The Power to Alter Things 1905–1924*, ed. by Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, 4 vols (London Virago, 1984), III, p. 288.

⁶⁷ O'Flaherty (like H. E. Bates later on) owed a lot to Edward Garnett, as he himself explains in his 'Autobiographical Note' in John Gawsworth, *Ten Contemporaries: Notes Towards Their Definitive*

though, the journal published material of little cultural significance, a far cry from the cultural concerns of literary London: contributions by George Bassett Digby from Siberia (on snake tales and local folk-tales) are the most memorable.⁶⁸ It is clear that MacCarthy, unlike his predecessor, failed to keep the journal engaged with contemporary literary and historical developments. He did not have clearly-defined views on the function of a literary journal in the post-war world. By contrast, some of MacCarthy's contemporary competitors, such as Leonard Woolf at the *Nation*, T. S. Eliot at the *Criterion*, and John Middleton Murry at the *Adelphi* were far more tuned to the literary changes of the period, being more open to experimentation and innovation in literature.⁶⁹ In fact, fiction was MacCarthy's weakest part of the journal. He was more concerned with 'drama reviewing' and 'art criticism', where, as a result of winning over Roger Fry to the journal, an engagement with cutting edge artistic production was certainly registered.

The most insightful and perceptive analysis of MacCarthy comes from V. S. Pritchett. Being well acquainted with the world of literary journalism, and having served as a literary editor of the *NS*, Pritchett is ideally placed to assess MacCarthy's contribution to inter-war cultural production. In a tribute to MacCarthy published after his death, Pritchett wrote of his abilities as critic and failings as a literary figure in the twentieth century. As a critic: 'He was not academic. He had no theoretical apparatus. He

Bibliography, 2nd series (London: Joiner and Steele, 1933), pp. 139-43, 'Cape took the manuscript on the recommendation of Edward Garnett. I met Edward Garnett. He took me in hand and suggested I should write about animals. In fact, I owe Edward Garnett all I know about the craft and a great deal of all I know about the art of writing. To his kindness, his help, his marvellous critical faculty and his loving friendship I owe whatever success I have had subsequently in creating my work' (p. 143). Garnett has an important place in the literary history of the *NS*, strongly advocating the journal's publication of the stories of Liam O'Flaherty and, then, H. E. Bates, whose rural realist fiction from the late 20s onwards constitute the most sustained challenge to the falsifications of Georgian ruralism ever to be published in the journal.

⁶⁸ For example, 'The Ungrateful Snake: A Siberian Folklore Tale', *NS*, 31 December 1921, pp. 369-70.

⁶⁹ For Woolf's impressive list of authors, including Forster, Lytton Strachey, Bertrand Russell, T. S. Eliot, and Robert Graves, see his *Downhill All the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939* (London: Hogarth Press, 1975), pp. 129-30.

belonged to no school'.⁷⁰ For Pritchett, MacCarthy would have felt more at home in the nineteenth century, where the origins of his critical taste and his conception of literature can be found:

We can, I think, make a guess if we say that MacCarthy was almost the last of what we must call the gentleman critics, the cultivated man of private means who began to write in 1800, when there was a large educated public of liberal mind, and who could rely on the liberal assumptions about both literature and society. What obtrudes, what is ill-mannered, what is very unorthodox, fashionable, or outside the middle of the stream, was likely to come in for a short, sharp rap. Literature for him was the library, not the forge; it was the reader's rather than the writer's world.

John Gross also situates MacCarthy in the same literary tradition: 'MacCarthy was not a strikingly original critic, nor even, in himself, a particularly important one. His importance was simply that of someone who helped to keep alive a tradition of breadth, enlightenment, rational sociability, and civilised forbearance'.⁷¹ Keeping the tradition alive came at a cost. Pritchett argues that for such a bourgeois sensibility, interwar literary developments were distasteful: 'When he looked at the writers of the twenties, and even more those of the thirties, he found inevitably much that was ill-mannered, experimental, revolutionary, and prone to theories which he deeply suspected'. MacCarthy's gentlemanly conception of literature, and his understanding of its function in the world, have left their marks on the literary section of the *NS*. His taste stifled consistency and originality in the back half of the journal, and he 'failed to foster talent in any sort of systematic and conscientious fashion'.⁷² The literary section's previous

⁷⁰ V. S. Pritchett, 'Tributes to Sir Desmond MacCarthy', *The Listener*, 26 June 1952, pp. 1031-2 (p. 1031). Next quotations are all from p. 1032.

⁷¹ John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: Aspects of English Literary Life Since 1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), p. 245. In the literary world of inter-war Britain, Gross sees John Middleton Murry as MacCarthy's antithesis.

⁷² Smith, *The New Statesman*, p. 186.

engagement with the social and political spheres disappears, then, leaving behind a gap only filled by a new generation of writers from the late 20s onwards.

MacCarthy's reign as literary editor should be contrasted with the time he lost interest in the journal and started planning his next venture (editing *Life and Letters*, to which he finally turned in 1928), leaving his assistant editor, G. W. Stonier, a free hand to run the back half. The change is registered in the journal from 1926 onwards. It is characterised by a sharp increase in the total number of short stories published, a diversification of sources (contributors) and themes (subject matter), and a sense of cultural activity and exchange that was absent in the 'MacCarthy era'. In the period of 1926-1930, R. M. Fox returns with five essays and three short stories dealing with working class issues; H. E. Bates starts publishing short stories and reviews on the English countryside; E. R. Morrough, a new recruit, publishes a dozen short stories and several essays on Egypt under the English; Ikbāl Ali Shāh, a Sufi Afghani, contributes several essays and short stories on Islam and the east; other pieces from colonial settings are also published by Winifred Holtby, E. D. Gotien, William Plomer, and E. G. Lee; and, lastly, V. S. Pritchett starts publishing short stories in the journal and later becomes a regular reviewer. All things considered, the *NS* experiences a storm of cultural activity in the period following the General Strike. Unlike the literary section under MacCarthy, Stonier's editorship responds to, and engages with, contemporary cultural production. Under Stonier's influence, the *NS* is able to register an emerging radicalisation in the ranks of the literary intelligentsia and an increasing consciousness of class brought about by the experience of the General Strike. Furthermore, the journal's field of interest grows

to include literary engagements with colonial life, a sphere it had previously neglected. From MacCarthy's period of stagnation, the *NS* comes to life into a period characterised by richness, diversity, and growing attentiveness to new cultural movements. This literary boom and the cultural changes it mediates is topic of the next section of the thesis.

Chapter 3

Oppression, Struggle, and Flight in the Late 20s

3.1 Introduction

If one reads the 20s as Rose Macaulay does, as ‘a good decade; gay, decorative, intelligent, extravagant, cultured’, one misses the point, or sees only half the picture.¹ As John Lucas argues: ‘As soon as we turn from the glittering lives of the social butterflies we can see that the definitive moment for the 1920s is not the Wall Street Crash but the General Strike’.² The fiction of the *NS* in the late 20s is testimony to that.

Issues of class conflict, struggle, social and gender oppression are dominant. With the defeat of the General Strike of 1926, working-class concerns come again to preoccupy the fiction of the *NS*, and R. M. Fox returns as regular contributor to the journal. The Strike dramatically exposes the nature of class society in interwar Britain and increases the awareness of working-class issues and conditions in society as a whole. The unfolding post-war process of working-class representation does in fact gain tremendous force from the events of 1926, as is clearly demonstrated by D. H. Lawrence’s significant post-war return in fiction to the historical problems of class politics in *The First Lady Chatterley*, an early version of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928).

It is also clearly significant that just before Arnold Bennett (then a *NS* director) started writing his post-General Strike novel, *Accident* (1928), he published a deeply

¹ Quoted in John Montgomery, *The Twenties* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), p. 204.

² John Lucas, *The Radical Twenties* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 1997), p. 3.

ideological short story in the *NS* entitled 'The Reek', where he unashamedly defends the established social order and its system of values against the (then still) striking miners. Bennett's hostility to the workers in 1926 is notorious and is mainly based on the much-quoted comments he made in his *Journal* on the subject. 'The Reek' is unique in that it provides us with a rare opportunity to venture out of his *Journal* and explore the working out of his attitudes towards the striking workers in a fictive mode.

In addition, with the re-introduction of Fox in the late 20s there also comes a sustained interest in other working-class writers. Side by side with his socialist contributions there begin to appear short stories by H. E. Bates about various aspects of working-class existence in the countryside. Being able to see the living, changing issues of class and society in the countryside is a crucial diversion from the dominant rural tradition in English culture exemplified by W. H. Hudson and Richard Jefferies, making Bates's contributions even more distinctive. What he brings to the countryside is a way of looking and registering working-class social life that is mainly associated with an urban/industrial not a rural setting. The emergence of Bates in the *NS* of the late 20s proves to be an even more significant development in view of the fact that in the 1930s Bates actually becomes the English writer with the largest number of short-story contributions to the journal.

Finally, with the focus on class comes a focus on gender. Women won full political enfranchisement in 1928, and Virginia Woolf published her foundational feminist tract *A Room of One's Own* in 1929. A sudden and unprecedented rise in the number of contributions by women is registered in the *NS* in the late 20s, covering themes ranging from travel in the Riviera to gender oppression and religion. Contributions from Rebecca West and

short stories by Faith Compton Mackenzie and Antonia White are relevant here, paving the way for an influx of contributions by other women writers in the early 30s.

3.2.1 Arnold Bennett and the General Strike

At the level of national history, big-time politics, the General Strike is written off as anything from a disaster to a mistake: a consequent moderation and reformism is ideologically deduced from it. But the part of the history that most needs emphasis, and that was actually very evident in that country station and in thousands of other places up and down the country, was the growth of consciousness during the action itself [...] it was the steady and remarkable self-realisation of the capacity of a class, in its own sufficient social relations and in its potentially positive social and economic power.³

At no time since has the capitalist nature of the British State been so thoroughly exposed. For a few days in 1926 working people saw every organ of local and central government, the police and army, radio and press, scabs, employers and fascists united as one instrument against the labour movement. And because *this* was exposed, so equally was the character of those labour leaders who chose to work within the limits of the constitution and so became its captives. Such moments of truth are rare in British history. Rarer still, however, was the feeling of power and self-confidence which the strike gave working people.⁴

When one comes to the practice of politics, anyone writing about his life in the years 1924-1939 must answer the crucial question: "What did you do in the General Strike?"⁵

The General Strike of 1926 lasted for nine days, from midnight 3 May to 12 May. It was called by the Trade Union Council as a solidarity measure with the miners' struggle against worsening wages and conditions, expressed by the cry: 'not a minute on the day, not a penny off the pay'. In all, more than 4 million unionised workers were called out, with many non-union workers striking in sympathy as well. Workers in transport, printing, iron and steel, power stations, building and chemical industries, engineering, shipbuilding and textiles all went out on strike. There were no national or local newspapers, no trains, no trams, and there

³ Raymond Williams, 'The Social Significance of 1926', in *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, ed. by Robin Gable (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 105-110 (p. 108).

⁴ John Foster, 'British Imperialism and the Labour Aristocracy', in *The General Strike 1926*, ed. by Jeffrey Skelley (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), pp. 3-57 (p. 3).

were coal shortages.⁶ Work was suspended, and the country ground to a near halt.

Emergency supplies were distributed by the government-run OMS (Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies) which employed volunteers from the middle to upper classes.

Workers stood together in solidarity, and against them stood the government and most of the bourgeoisie. It was a class conflict, with each group pursuing its own (and to the other antagonistic) class interests. As John Foster argues in the above quotation, rarely has the nature and function of the capitalist state in British society been so thoroughly exposed. And rarely has the confidence of the British working class to organise as a class been so great. It is here, in what Raymond Williams calls 'the self-realisation of the capacity of a class', that the achievement and significance of the General Strike lies: 'For the significance of 1926, in so short a time, is still the rise and extension of consciousness, during those days, to an effective national and class presence'.⁷ Such class solidarity and loyalty actively involved a clear challenge to those other, hegemonic loyalties of the 'nation' and the 'national interest'. As Williams has put it, the workers were moved to strike by 'an idea of the class, of the solidarity of the class, and this, often – as notably in 1926 – in contradiction of the idea of a larger loyalty to which we have all been trained: to what is called the nation, the national interest, and expressing this the significant formalities of contract and of law'. In short, workers went against the ruling class, its State, and its dominant values with a strong belief in the righteousness of their struggle and the justice of their cause. But such solidarity wasn't to last. To the shock and horror of the striking workers, their position was betrayed when at its

⁵ Leonard Woolf, *Downhill All the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939* (London: Hogarth Press, 1975), p. 217.

⁶ The Government published the notoriously anti-workers *British Gazette*, edited from the offices of the *Daily Mail* by Winston Churchill, while the Trade Unions published *The British Workers*. Both are reproduced in *The General Strike of 1926: The British Gazette & The British Worker* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles Reprints, 1971).

⁷ Williams, 'The Social Significance of 1926', p. 109. Next quotation is from page 107.

strongest by the Trade Union leadership, which called off the Strike on the ninth day without receiving any guarantees from the Government against wage cuts or worsening conditions for the miners.⁸

The British intelligentsia reacted unequally and unevenly to the Strike. Most of those who felt that they had to 'take sides' volunteered to help the government. This, as one historian has argued, was the position of most of the middle class, self-identified in the interwar period as 'the constitutional' class, 'the public', and 'society':

The most striking manifestation of this was the emergence of the middle classes as strike-breakers. The 1920s was the first and the last decade in which large numbers of middle-class people were prepared, by breaking strikes, to defend the constitution in person [...] The most remarkable demonstration of this was during the general strike in 1926.⁹

The 'Bright Young Things' of the 20s ended up on the side of the government, as Douglas Goldring has remarked: 'come to the General Strike, most of the Bright Young Things joined the despised professional middle class in rallying to the Government standard and [they] kept the essential services running by supplying 'blackleg' labour'.¹⁰ The Bloomsbury group, though, was divided, with Clive Bell throwing his weight behind the government while

⁸ The most recent studies of the General Strike are Keith Laybourn, *The General Strike of 1926* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1993), and his *The General Strike Day by Day* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1996). Many books on the Strike were published in 1976 to commemorate its 50th anniversary (see, for example, Gordon Phillips, *The General Strike: The Politics of Industrial Conflict* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976)). The 50th anniversary was even noted in the weekly and periodical press. The *NS* published recollections of the event by A. J. P. Taylor, 'Class War: 1926' (30 April 1976, pp. 572-3), as well as Siegfried Sassoon's previously unpublished 'Three Poems on the General Strike' (p. 577).

⁹ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 58. Considering the widespread impact of the General Strike on British culture and society, it is surprising to note how little coverage and interpretative weight it receives in history books, and McKibbin's volume is a case in point. He manages to write a whole book on the classes and cultures of post-War Britain with only a cursory treatment of the General Strike, limited to one paragraph only (p. 147). Equally baffling is how he completely sidelines an event like the Spanish Civil War (caused by the overthrow of a democratically elected government), leaving it even without the one paragraph treatment that the Strike receives, in a volume subtitled (though not on the title page) 'a study of a democratic society'. By practically erasing the Strike from his account, McKibbin undermines its significance and ignores and undervalues its central place in actual material history.

¹⁰ Quoted in Lucas, *Radical Twenties*, p. 41.

Leonard and Virginia Woolf throwing theirs against it.¹¹ The Woolfs actively supported the workers and collected signatures for a petition launched by Archbishop Randall Davidson asking the Prime Minister to guarantee that no workers be victimised at the end of the Strike. In fact, the Strike had a very significant impact on Virginia, then in the middle of writing *To the Lighthouse*. She felt caged in, disturbed and powerless as a result of the rupturing of social normality caused by the conflict. The Strike brought out her fear of disharmony, division, disturbance, and conflict, and her preference for (aesthetic and social) merger and unity.¹²

Other writers who backed the workers had a more radical response. Kingsley Martin, for example, who was to become the editor of the *NS* in a couple of years time and one of the most important figures of the popular front in the 30s, found himself, like Leonard Woolf, in complete support of the workers and of their adopted tactics. He even felt that it was a good time to question the legitimacy and validity of capitalism as a social system for organising production. In his book, *The British Public and the General Strike* (1926), published by the Hogarth Press, he argued that:

Capitalism, the vague word we use for an unorganised method of supplying the goods and services of society, seems progressively incapable of satisfying our needs. The problem that arises cannot be settled by common sense; a concession here or a strike defeated there does nothing to solve it. A time comes when refusal to consider the philosophic basis on which society rests means disaster.¹³

¹¹ Of the workers Bell was later to write in his post-Strike *Civilisation* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1928): 'Far from discovering amongst them any will to civilisation, I am led to suspect that the British working man likes his barbarism well enough. Only he would like a little more of it' (p. 255).

¹² See Kate Flint, 'Virginia Woolf and the General Strike', *Essays in Criticism*, 36 (1986), 319-34. This is a very important essay on Woolf. Flint draws connections between Woolf's aesthetics and social politics and skilfully argues that even though she sided with the workers in the conflict her radicalism was limited and she 'failed to make an imaginative leap across class boundaries' (p. 324). Woolf's thoughts about the Strike are recorded in several diary entries written during the Strike, see *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, 1925-1930*, ed. by Anne Oliver Bell (London: Penguin, 1982).

¹³ Kingsley Martin, *The British Public and the General Strike* (London: Hogarth Press, 1926), p. 19.

His book repeats his claim that working-class striking is a legitimate force for change, a form of struggle that has played a major role in the history of modern England.

One of the most radical literary responses to the Strike came from D. H. Lawrence, who returns to class, and reconstructs it as lived experience in his *The First Lady Chatterley*, which, as Raymond Williams has argued, is very much a post-General Strike novel: 'Indeed when I think back to *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1928 and to the General Strike only two years earlier I know there are connections of the most imperative kind.'¹⁴ By capturing the connectedness of social/political history and writing, Williams initiates the beginning of a (far from completed) project to examine and analyse the impact of the events of 1926 on British cultural production.¹⁵ Lawrence is central to such a project. *The First Lady Chatterley* is thus unique in thematically advancing class as central to understanding social divisions, personal and social relationships and feelings. In fact, it is a novel about what it means to belong to a class and the nature of cross-class encounters or contacts, as one character in the novel states: '“But what I want to know – what puzzles me – is how folks can be in the same country – speak the same language – read the same papers an' all that – an' yet be really, *really* different in their feelings.’¹⁶ Class is always on the agenda in the novel, being felt, lived, compared, discussed, fought over, and resented.¹⁷

¹⁴ Raymond Williams, *The English Novel: From Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Hogarth Press, 1971), p. 186.

¹⁵ The defining impact of the Strike on interwar culture has yet to be addressed. However, following Williams's cue, the response of many writers to the General Strike like D. H. Lawrence, John Galsworthy, H.G. Wells, Harold Heslop, Lewis Grassic Gibbon, and Storm Jameson has been discussed in Adrian Mellor, Chris Pawling, Colin Sparks, 'Writers and the General Strike', in *The General Strike*, ed. by Margaret Morris (London: Journeyman Press, 1976), pp. 338-57. This pioneering essay aims 'to attempt an initial reconstruction of the whole range of typical literary responses to 1926, and through that, to begin to disinter the whole range of typical social responses' (p. 338).

¹⁶ D. H. Lawrence, *The First Lady Chatterley* (London: Heinemann, 1972; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 194.

¹⁷ For some interesting examples, see the following: p. 191-9, p. 229-30, and p. 242. Two important discussions of the novel can be found in: Graham Holderness, *D. H. Lawrence: History, Ideology and Fiction* (London: Gill and Macmillan, 1982); and Graham Martin, '“History” and “Myth” in D. H. Lawrence's Chatterley Novels', in *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Arnold, 1984),

Such a preoccupation with class is also at the heart of 'A Return to Bestwood', an essay Lawrence wrote after his visit to his native Nottinghamshire in autumn 1926 and during the miners' strike that followed the end of the General Strike. Of the miners he says, for example: 'They are the only people who move me strongly, and with whom I feel myself connected in deeper destiny. It is they who are, in some peculiar way, "home" to me. I shrink away from them, and I have an acute nostalgia for them.'¹⁸ Very much like Kingsley Martin, Lawrence also believes that the post-General Strike period is a time for re-assessing and changing the existing social order: 'I know we are on the brink of a class war [...] I know our vision of life is all wrong. We must be prepared to have a new conception of what it means, *to live*. And everybody should try to help to build up this new conception, and everybody should be prepared to destroy, bit by bit, our old conception.' Part of that new conception can be gleaned in the poem 'Wages' (1929), in which Lawrence attacks his contemporary world of 'vicious competition' and unequivocally declares wage-earning to be a form of social imprisonment:

Earning a wage is a prison occupation
and a wage-earner is a sort of goal-bird.

As another poem of this period, 'Work' (1929), makes clear, change will come when 'men will smash the machines.'¹⁹

Lawrence's radicalism was, of course, countered with extreme conservatism and reactionaryism (and, of course, by the time of the third *Lady Chatterley* by Lawrence himself). One such response, pertinent to the study of the *NS* in the late 20s, was Arnold

pp. 62- 74. For Williams and Lawrence, see Jeff Wallace, 'Language, Nature and the Politics of Materialism: Raymond Williams and D. H. Lawrence' in *Raymond Williams: Politics, Education, Letters*, ed. by John W. Morgan and Peter Preston (New York: St. Martin's, 1993), pp. 105-28.

¹⁸ *Phoenix II: Uncollected, Unpublished and Other Works by D. H. Lawrence*, ed. by Warren Roberts and Harry T. Moore (London: Heinemann, 1968), pp. 257-66 (p. 264). Next quotation is from p. 265.

Bennett's. Working-class solidarity meant nothing to him, and he saw the Strike as unpatriotic and criminal. Bennett, although never volunteering for the OMS, was vehemently opposed to the strikers, as his Journal entries of this period clearly demonstrate. The following is from 11 May 1926: 'I am still sticking to my point with everyone that the calling of the general strike is a political crime that must be paid for. Also that the general strike is revolutionary, that is, aimed at the authority of the Government. How this can be denied when the Unions Council has the infernal cheek to issue permits to goods and vehicles to use the roads and railways, I cannot understand. As if anybody could possibly need permission to use roads except in a revolution.'²⁰ On the next day he wrote: 'The general strike now seems pitiful, foolish – a pathetic attempt of the underdogs who hadn't a chance when the over-dogs really set themselves to win. Everybody, nearly, among the over-dogs seems to have joined in with grim enthusiasm to beat the strike.' According to Bennett, the 'underdogs' have revolted against the authority of the government and will have to be beaten. No sympathy towards the miners here, even though their position was widely acknowledged as just by the Liberal press and by the *NS* itself.²¹ Their miserable wages and conditions don't even get a passing mention in Bennett's Journal. The issue is represented as a revolutionary breach of authority which has to end. No other questions need to be addressed.

The situation of the miners (the main reason for the Strike) is also not addressed in a more extended treatment (1000 words) he wrote during the Strike for the *New York Herald Tribune*, entitled 'Labor's Strike Policy Suicidal In Opinion of Arnold Bennett'. This American article is in fact Bennett's only newspaper piece on the Strike. No such piece

¹⁹ Both poems are anthologised in Keith Thomas, *The Oxford Book of Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 34, pp. 148-9 (p. 149).

²⁰ Arnold Bennett, *Journals of Arnold Bennett 1921-1928* (London: Cassell, 1933), p. 134. Next quotation is also from p. 134.

appeared in Britain. Again he affirms the government's solid will to beat the Strike, as his opening paragraph affirms: 'Solidarity is the great word. We have had two supreme illustrations of it. The completeness of the "general strike" is one. And the completeness that will beat it is the other. There is solidarity on both sides.'²² Bennett criticises the Trade Union leadership for thinking they could win such a confrontation. He accuses them of losing the trust of the British public and of failing to understand what he calls, to the pleasure of his American readers presumably, 'Anglo-Saxon human nature': 'That any minds with any experience whatever of Anglo-Saxon human nature should have imagined for one moment that a general strike could succeed in Great Britain is astounding.' Bennett assumes the reader knows exactly what he means by 'Anglo-Saxon human nature' and, sadly, leaves the phrase hanging without adequate explanation. Is it that the Anglo-Saxons hate strikes or revolutions, or are they merely left unmoved by them? Surely, Bennett isn't suggesting that there is something in their nature as a race that makes them completely oblivious or unsusceptible to popular political pressure. Yet, aren't the workers Anglo-Saxons as well, or do the government and its allies have a monopoly over Anglo-Saxonism? Bennett seems to think that there is a particular Anglo-Saxon way of solving a coal dispute where the workers have been conceding one defeat after another and the government and coal owners have refused to accept the recommendations of a Royal Commission like Sankey's which recommended nationalisation of the mines as the best solution to the post-war problems of the coal industry. In fact, what is the Anglo-Saxon way of going about solving such an industrial dispute? Bennett, alas, is untroubled by such considerations. It might be possible to

²¹ For a summary of the *NS*'s position see Anon., [G. D. H. Cole], 'Some Lessons of the Late General Strike', *NS*, 19 June 1926, pp. 254-5.

²² 9 May 1926, p. 1, p. 3. Bennett's piece is introduced in the following terms: 'Novelist Says Any Class Taking Anglo-Saxon by Throat in Such Fashion will Speedily Regret It.'

answer these questions, or at least come close to understanding what Bennett means by the phrase, by referring to a short story he published in the *NS* in the period following the collapse of the General Strike when the miners were left to stand alone for seven more months. ‘Anglo-Saxon human nature’ could for Bennett well refer to all that has been challenged by the miners, all that is ‘orderly’, ‘tidy’, ‘dignified’, and ‘neat’, in fact all that is ‘stable’ and ‘firm’ in society.

3.2.2 The Reek and the Great Western Tradition: Bennett Smells a Threat

And these qualities of the Great Western [Railway] system seem to have communicated themselves to the cities, towns, and villages that it serves. All that so rapidly passes before the gaze is neat, tidy, orderly, respectable, dignified – canals, rivers, ponds, bridges, fields, hedges, racecourses, houses, churches, public buildings, even factories. All are spick-and-span like the railway, all tended, watched over, painted, repaired, darned, touched up. It is as if the whole of the populace was house-proud, in emulation of the pride of the railway.²³

Bennett here is writing about England and the Great Western Railway system. According to his logic, the Great Western produced and shaped England, not the other way around. The country was made (constructed and developed) in the image of the railway system and according to its qualities and values. From Bennett’s vantage-point, modern English civilisation emanated from the railways, and the resulting ‘monotony is magnificent, soothing’ (p. 736).

‘The Reek’ is a deeply conservative piece, where Bennett is self-delusional in his exaggerated praise and admiration for tradition and the system: ‘And there is the feeling of absolute security in a decent tradition which never began and will never end. Nothing, it seems, could ever destroy the firm structure of society here; hardly anything could

²³ Arnold Bennett, ‘The Reek’, *NS*, 9 October 1926, pp. 736- 7 (p. 736). References are given after quotations in the text.

conceivably challenge it' (p. 736). In the middle of the piece, he moves from this generalised admiration for the eternal, timeless, and hardly challenged Great Western tradition, and, in order to illustrate his point, chronicles a particular encounter he happens to witness on his train journey. He describes the behaviour of two gentlemen who seem to epitomise for him the system, and whose complexions 'had been worn and damaged [...] by excessive addiction to the open air' (p. 736). One of the two has a gun-case under his feet, and the other a bag of golf clubs. Throughout the four-hour journey, they only exchange a handful of words: 'The brain effort towards communion was evidently too much for them (p. 737). They remain, on the whole, withdrawn and uncommunicative. Of their reading habits Bennett observes: 'One read a conservative newspaper without pictures, and the other read an illustrated conservative newspaper [...] Neither had a book of any sort' (p. 737). Bennett also states that they have no 'intellectual resources' and merely wanted to kill time until the train reached its destination. In the meantime, they were merely 'existing, without cerebration', a condition which carries with it a clear political meaning for Bennett: 'They felt secure as important units in the great established social system – the system exemplified by the swift, smooth-gliding train, the trim villages, towns, cities, and landscapes' (p. 737). If they thought at all, they thought about how secure they were and how invulnerable the system is. For the narrator, they were assured and confident enough in their unchallenged world as not to need to use their brain, or cerebration.²⁴ Bennett seems at times quite ambivalent about whether or not he approves of their unthinking existence, so to speak, but is quite confident about what such an existence means both socially and politically: it is a sign of a firm system and a strong social structure which he greatly admires. Not even the reek

²⁴ The *OED* registers Bennett's usage of 'cerebrate' (to cogitate) in his 1928 novel *Strange Vanguard*, xlv, 303: 'The baron who was still most actively cerebrating, rang the bell.' Wells also used the verb in *New World Order*

that comes into their compartment from the burning coal causes them to ‘cerebrate’. The reek is ‘manfully tolerated’ by the two gentlemen and the narrator is the only one who is reminded of the fact that it is imported foreign coal: ‘The reek came from the engine, which was producing inferior foreign smoke from inferior foreign coal bought by the railway company at vast expense in the absence of superior British coal [...] Those British miners were still obstinately attacking the great established system’ (p. 737).

Bennett’s loyalties lie with the established order, and he refuses to acknowledge the action of the miners for what it really is, a defensive measure against worsening wages and conditions. For him, the miners are obstinate, and they haven’t really succeeded in challenging tradition. They are in fact a nuisance, in so far as their refusal to work is the reason behind the burning of foreign coal on a Great Western train, the smell of which is ‘manfully tolerated’ by his gentleman protagonists. Bennett’s patriotism is as strongly affirmed as his classism in this piece. How dare the miners strike and make us suffer the disagreeable fumes of foreign coal?

3.2.3 Rumbblings, Accidents and Suppressions

Well, the accident was having its uses. In a way he was glad of the accident. It had the effect of bringing hidden matters to the surface, of intensifying emotion and discouraging suppressions. It might, it probably would, influence the whole future.²⁵

In ‘The Reek’, Bennett’s protagonists are assured in their position and confident in the invulnerability of the established social and political order. Their position can be contrasted with that of Alan Frith-Walter, the bourgeois protagonist of *Accident* (1929), a novel Bennett

in 1940.

²⁵ Arnold Bennett, *Accident* (London: Cassell, 1929), p. 250. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

started writing just after he published his *NS* short story. *Accident* is also set on a train and the title refers to the protagonist's feeling that a train collision is imminent, as John Lucas has argued: 'What really catches the attention is that from the very outset a brooding, menacing sense of imminent disaster hangs over Frith-Walter's journey. The possibility of an accident never seems very far away.'²⁶ Frith-Walter feels that there is 'Something wrong somewhere [...] and society was sick' (p. 5). The political and social problems embodied by the reek in 'The Reek', the issues left lurking below the surface, unvoiced, and untreated, find their way into *Accident*. Here the protagonist acknowledges and confronts the world suppressed by 'The Reek' and feels that social and class divisions, though not new, have increased and sharpened in his lifetime and have become more visible: 'After all, there was nothing new in these notions concerning the contrasts of existence. He had had them, vaguely, for years [...]. But of late these notions had been growing clearer in outline, less vague, more insistent: the spirit of the age besieging, investing, the citadel of his conscience' (p. 52-3).

Bennett's portrait of an individual experiencing a sense of social and political uncertainty, worried and insecure, does not last, however, and he spends the second half of the novel re-suppressing such social concerns and re-affirming the established order of confident, assured bourgeois individualism undisturbed by the world of politics. As John Lucas says: 'As we read the first half of *Accident* we feel that it is surely about the 'vast smug surface' of society, below which are obscure, persistent and increasingly powerful rumblings that at any moment will erupt into violent destructiveness.'²⁷ Such an unsettled

²⁶ John Lucas, *Arnold Bennett: A Study of His Fiction* (London: Methuen. 1974), p. 213.

²⁷ Lucas, *Arnold Bennett*, p. 217. By this stage, Lucas hadn't yet linked the novel's expressed social fears and worries and its sense of imminent disaster to social history and the General Strike. He explained the disturbances away as belonging to the spirit of the age: 'Even more than the 1890s the spirit of the age at the end of the 1920s must have seemed *fin de siècle*' (p. 217-8). In his *The Radical Twenties* (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 1997), where he had an opportunity to return to *Accident*, he discusses the novel as a post-General Strike event: '*Accident* is therefore a most instructive novel, because it so obviously testifies to the

state is resolved by a clear shift of emphasis that occurs in the second half of the novel, a shift away from these public disturbances and towards the realm of bourgeois domesticity and domestic harmony. This feat is accomplished by Pearl, the daughter-in-law of Alan Frith-Walter, who attacks Jack (her husband) for his excessive concern with politics and his wish to join the Labour Party. She says: ‘ “As if all politics weren’t class war! And if there isn’t class war, who’s going to begin one? It’s Labour that’s out for a class war. Not that I care so much about class. What I care about is my family, and yours too. When you really get down to bedrock, the family is the most important thing’ (p. 255-6). Indeed, Jack is moved to submission by his wife’s pleas for the sanctity of the family, leading the narrator to comment: ‘For Pearl had captured the whole of his sympathy by her appeal for the institution of the family. The family for him was more sacred than anything else in the social structure. It was the main article of his religion’ (p. 256).

Bennett’s rejection of the political for the domestic is a point also made by Lucas who argues that the political rumblings and uneasiness among the socially conscious bourgeoisie, represented by Jack, find their way into Bennett’s novel only to be rejected. Indeed, Bennett shies away from the novel’s original impetus and direction, the engagement with the ‘disruptive forces’ of the political and public sphere. According to Lucas: ‘The whole book does an abrupt about-turn. What had been a novel dealing with contemporary society now becomes a novel operating on a purely domestic level’.²⁸ Politics is silenced by the call for domesticity and the upholding and prioritising of the private sphere of the family. By turning the novel around, Bennett guards himself and his characters against the world of politics and

sense of anti-climax which followed the ending of the general strike’ (p. 169). My argument is indebted to the work of John Lucas.

²⁸ Lucas, *Arnold Bennett*, p. 218.

conflict and moves swiftly to reaffirm the centrality of the private bourgeois sphere in his conception of the novel.

Contemporary political developments disturbed him. His rejection of politics in *Accident* is in line with his hostile political response to the General Strike, a time when politics and class conflict dominated social life and impinged upon his own world of bourgeois individualism. The General Strike upset the bourgeois separation of private and public spheres, a separation which is very much upheld in 'The Reek', momentarily collapses after that, and gets strongly reaffirmed in the second half of *Accident*. Accordingly, the pattern of Bennett's response to the General Strike can be traced as follows: in the Journals he writes of revolution and crimes against authority and the established order; in 'The Reek' he, by contrast, over-determines the hegemony of the social order; and in *Accident* there is a preliminary lapse, a collapse of the public into the private, leading to friction and possible collision, and ending with the re-affirmation of bourgeois tradition and society, including the re-affirmation of the private sphere of bourgeois individualism. Blissful domesticity is at the end re-located islands away from Labour.²⁹

²⁹ For a more radical conception of the public/private problematic and a rejection of the bourgeois de-politicisation of the 'private' sphere see Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (London: George G. Harrap, 1929). This is a unique novel, the only one in the interwar years which has the events of 1926 at the very heart of its thematic construction. In its conception of politics and society, *Clash* is also a precursor of the cultural politics of the 30s.

3.3.1 R. M. Fox and Working-Class Literature

R. M. Fox's work first appeared in the *NS* in 1920. 'Factory Life' was a significant departure from a dominant bourgeois mode of representing the working class as objects of pity and 'deserving' of charity. Having experienced modern industrial labour himself, in this, his first piece to be published in the journal Fox goes directly to the factory in the hope of elucidating to the reader the forces and daily pressures operating on the contemporary factory worker. His declared intention is to demystify workers and make them more understood: their motivations, collective daily struggles and conflicts with management, and the harsh industrial conditions they work under are all considered.

Ruskin graduate and socialist, Fox is pre-eminently a working-class intellectual of the 20s.³⁰ Throughout the decade, he responds to what he sees as the growing importance of the urban working class in social life, and he traces the impact of changing work practices and machinofacture on labour. His impressive critical analyses of working-class literature and culture in the *NS* span major developments in drama and fiction, from Gorky's vagabonds in Russia to Upton Sinclair and Frank Norris's novels about America. Before examining Fox's own working-class fiction published in the literary section, it is necessary to chart the development of his ideas on working-class literature and society and examine closely his analysis of the representation of labour in contemporary culture.

One essay in particular is central to understanding his thought. Published in the *NS* early in 1927, 'The Wage-earner in Literature' outlines the changing representation of the proletariat in fiction from the early literary conventions of the Victorians to Emile Zola's *Germinal* (1885) and Robert Tressell's seminal *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*

(1913). Fox argues that writers are ‘ever so responsive to the winds of thought sweeping across the world’, and their fiction has reflected ‘the advancing status of the worker, which is a marked characteristic of the age’.³¹ In effect, the conventional images and caricatures of wage-earners in literature as ‘old gardeners and servants, family retainers’, as ‘cap-fumbling workmen who cringe to their “betters” ’ (p. 445), as, basically, secondary characters of minor importance to the development of the plot, have been challenged and have already started to change. One of the pioneers of this revolution in representation is Emile Zola, who dedicated a whole novel to the life and labour of the French miners of Anzin. For Fox, *Germinal*, with its closely observed details, ‘still remains an ideal example of writing in a working class milieu’ (p. 445), depicting as it does both the harsh realities of mining and the hope for change.

Fox thus advocates a working-class literature that engages with the full complexity and humanity of labouring life: ‘Working-class life is not all wretched, pessimistic or protesting’ (p. 446), and this is where Tressell erred, he argues. Economic and political struggle should be represented exactly because it is an intrinsic part of working-class existence, but it is not the whole picture. Fox’s own conception and definition of working-class fiction are spatial in thrust. He thinks of it as a literature that represents all the major sites of working-class social interaction: ‘A literature dealing with the cottage, not the hall; the tenement, not the drawing-room; the workshop, not the life of leisure – and viewing all life from this new angle – is what is meant by working-class literature’ (p. 446). This emerging mode, interested in workers’ habitations and workplaces, is also found in American

³⁰ For a brief biographical note see *Tramps, Workmates and Revolutionaries*, ed. by H. Gustav Klaus, pp. 175-6. More recently, see Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 302-303.

fiction, and the 'literature of effort' of Ernest Poole (*The Harbour*) and Frank Norris (*Octopus*) is cited with approval.

Fox's account of the rise of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century working-class literature is admirable in its scope and comparative outlook, especially in its engagement with continental and American literatures. However, it is a limited account, suffering from serious omissions. For example, no reference is made to George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859) and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), novels that should indeed feature in an account of the changing representations of workers in literature. Dickens is only paid lip service, and neither in this nor his other essays does Fox engage with English writers' varied responses to the growing forces of industrialisation. Significantly, he omits from his account English literature of the 1830s and 40s. Although he does go as far back as Dickens, he fails to deal with either Chartist literature or with the industrial novels of the 1840 – such as Mrs Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, Disraeli's *Sybil*, or Kingsley's *Alton Locke*.³² As a result, Zola is posited as the single most important figure who broke with the old conventions of representation. In view of this, it is perhaps surprising that Fox never even raises the question of Zola's possible influence on late-Victorian attitudes to workers in fiction, clearly evident in the naturalist fiction of George Gissing.³³ It is more difficult to understand, however, why he never mentions D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913) in his account of twentieth-

³¹ R. M. Fox, 'The Wage-earner in Literature', *NS*, 22 January 1927, pp. 445-6 (p. 445). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

³² For a discussion of British industrial fiction see Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, pp. 87-109.

³³ John Lucas, 'From Naturalism to Symbolism', in *Romantic to Modern Literature: Essays and Ideas of Culture 1750-1900* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), pp. 188-205. Fox, at the beginning, didn't share the defeatist pessimism of naturalist fiction (which Lucas elucidates), though his narrative style is a form of naturalist observation and reportage and he believes that workers are determined by factory circumstances and environment, sufficiently so, as I'll show below, to develop certain psychological-mental features and a certain philosophy of life. There does, however, remain a strong element of resistance in his conception of labour, an emphasis which disappears with the defeat of the General Strike.

century literary developments, a novel that epitomises working-class fiction early this century.

Nevertheless, Fox's main argument, and his general outline of a newly emerging naturalist-inspired mode of representation, remain valid. He is an important reference point in the analysis of working-class literature precisely because he sees the rise and consolidation of such fiction as part and parcel of the historical development of industrial societies in general. His conclusion situates the increasing literary representation of the working class within its growing significance as a social and political force, and he welcomes the proliferation of experiments conducted in this mode of fiction:

Now that wage-earners are advancing in politics, in economics and in social estimation, it is inevitable that they and their special problems should come to occupy a larger place in literature, long the preserve of urbane, cultured men of letters who have played beautifully with words. A whole new world, which cannot be crushed into any slick formula, is now demanding expression. (p. 446)

Fox particularly praises the new experiments being carried out in America, an emerging tradition strongly emphasised in 'The Wage-earner in Literature'. In fact, he elaborates on this new American literature in another piece that was published in the *NS*, where Jack London, Frank Norris, and Sinclair Lewis are all admired for their forward-looking approach. In 'The Crowbar in Literature', Fox argues that they are the most important figures writing in America today. He welcomes their 'challenge to [conventional] standardised ways and rules' in literature, and argues that London, Norris and Sinclair are pointing in the new direction that American literature is taking.³⁴ This emerging fiction is briefly contrasted with post-war European literature, whose practitioners suffer from a disfiguring 'acute melancholia', a state their contemporaries in America were lucky to escape: 'European literature since the war has

been a City of Dreadful Night. The loud jeering laugh of the profiteer wilted up such scraps of idealism as were left in the hearts of the young men when they limped home from the trenches and joined the labour exchanges' (p. 113).

3.3.2 Drama and the Triumphant Machine

Fox's analysis of dramatic form follows a similar pattern. Yet, crucially, here he introduces a new variable into the analysis of working-class society and culture: the domination of the machine. His three essays on drama published in the *NS*, 'The Machine Drama', 'Sean O'Casey: A Worker Dramatist', and 'The Drama of the Dregs', engage with representations of the worker in contemporary theatre and explore the relationship between worker and machine. His main ideas on drama are outlined in 'The Machine Drama', which, effectively, is an extended attack on Italian and Russian Futurism.

Fox systematically rejects Marinetti's Italian Futurism, his 'geometric forms', 'mechanic lines', and militaristic conception of human labour. Marinetti, he argues, structures humanity and human drama as machines: 'Marinetti tells us that machine forms express the true spirit of the age. The machine contains all the finer attributes of man, and he has only to assert the will to be a machine to recapture the best part of himself'.³⁴ For Marinetti, machine movement and functions are forms which drama should reproduce and express on the stage, an approach which found fertile ground in Russia, having been adopted by Meyerhold and Foregger. Influenced by the industrialist ideas of Taylor on the reorganisation of industrial labour according to the principles of Scientific Management,

³⁴ R. M. Fox, 'The Crowbar in Literature', *NS*, 7 May 1927, pp. 112-3 (p. 113). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

³⁵ R. M. Fox, 'The Machine Drama', *NS*, 9 January 1926, pp. 383-4 (p. 383). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

Meyerhold and Foregger developed dramatic concepts and techniques, such as a ‘Taylorised gesture’, to express machine movement and activity. ‘King Machine has been enthroned on the Russian stage’, Fox states, and he refers disapprovingly to Huntly Carter’s *The New Spirit in European Literature*: ‘The idealisation of the machine has gone so far that a sympathetic investigator, Mr Huntly Carter, says in his book on the Russian theatre, “...they attribute to the machine all their social and moral attributes... their own vitality, strength, courage, clearness, steel nerves, persistency, precision, rhythm, style, endurance” ’ (p. 383). A new philosophy of dramatic movement is being celebrated by Carter: ‘ “bio-mechanics, the science of the mechanisation of the body, assumes that the worker is an organised piece of mechanism like a machine... and that he is so much accustomed to machine movements and sounds that they form his natural modes of expression” ’ (p. 383). Fox takes issue with this ‘natural mode of expression’ and argues that ‘there is nothing distinctively working class about the glorification of machinery in drama’ (p. 384).

Against these dehumanising forces facing workers, Fox acclaims the new drama of Sean O’Casey: ‘a drama derived directly from working-class experience’ (p. 384). He praises O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) as a play where dignity and beauty are central.³⁶ In O’Casey, humanity is not crushed by environment but celebrated instead. This is central to Fox’s conception of working-class drama and its function as an art form:

The highest form of drama is that which enables people to develop as human beings – which brings to them beauty, nobility, dignity, all those qualities which differentiate men from machines and raise them above the beasts [...] Workmen, like other people, will continue to crave for beauty, nobility, dignity, for those human attributes of which they are deprived when they work and live in surroundings of sordid ugliness. (p. 383)

³⁶ In *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1953), pp. 147-153, Raymond Williams presents a more critical reading of O’Casey, arguing that ‘the structure of feeling of the self-exile, still within a collective action, which can be neither avoided nor taken wholly seriously; neither indifferent nor direct’ (p. 151) characterises his 20s plays set in the backdrop of revolution and civil war.

To progress and 'to make people individuals' is to satisfy these cravings for beauty and nobility. For Fox, art should celebrate the triumph of man not the triumph of machine, where triumphant man is seen as standing for democracy and machine worship an ally of dictatorship.

His essay raises more issues than it resolves. It is clear that he resents any celebrating of the machine as triumphant over humanity. His argument against Futurist representation of the proletariat on the stage is strongly expressed. It is also clear that he finds O'Casey's theatre far more derived from the realities of working-class life than Futurist drama. Questions arise, however, when he elaborates the standards against which he measures drama or artistic production: nobility, dignity, and beauty. According to Fox, it is these values or human attributes that the working class craves when surrounded by 'sordid ugliness'. Accordingly, these values should be re-affirmed in art, should even shine through the 'darkness' of the environment. But this avoids the problem of who decides what 'dignity' is, or 'beauty' or 'nobility', and the standards by which they are measured. Are they bourgeois; even, aristocratic? No evidence is produced to say that these qualities, defined from outside of the working class, are desired by or even important to it. Fox seems to be imposing these values on the working class just as much as the Futurists are imposing their own. He comes dangerously close to defining the working class as a lack: a class that lacks beauty in its surroundings, deprived from dignity and nobility by its labour.

Defining a class by what he thinks it does not have and by what he thinks it needs goes a long way in explaining Fox's hostility to Futurism. Machines and manufacture take away beauty from the working class and inflict, as it were, this lack upon it. His complete

rejection of any idealising of the machine is clearly related to the way he perceives it as having this damaging influence on labour. His conception of and attitudes towards the machine are not substantially treated in his *NS* essays. In order to better understand his position and the structure of attitudes and values that inform his hostility to Futurist drama, I need to digress briefly to his *The Triumphant Machine* (1928), a book that fully incorporates and builds on his *NS* essays.

In *The Triumphant Machine*, Fox charts the development of new forces operating on modern industrial labour (such as Taylorism and Fordism) and assesses the negative impact that machine technology has had on humanity. By fitting the worker into a pre-existing mould and forcing him to conform to a pre-designed factory formula, modern industry has ‘reshaped life and thought’. Workers have as a result developed what Fox calls in naturalist strain, following Thorstein Veblen, a mechanical ‘process view’, where human thought and action conform to workshop standards and processes: ‘It has a bearing on social thought, on religion, on politics, on literature, on history – on all those departments of human activity which are being crushed into the factory formula’.³⁷ Due to economic necessity and the pressures to earn a living, today’s workers ‘are subordinated to the machine; their hours arranged so that the machinery may be kept running. Their lives are shaped by the capacities and needs of the machines and all rose-coloured machine talk is distinctly premature’ (p. 109). This, Fox argues, is a direct result of the shift in emphasis that has occurred through the transition from tool work to machine industry; where in one, the former, ‘the man handling

³⁷ R. M. Fox, *The Triumphant Machine* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928), p. 64. Further references are given after quotations in the text. Fox seems to have been very well acquainted with Veblen’s views and social thought. He even wrote his obituary for the *NS* (‘Thorstein Veblen’, *NS*, 13 September 1930, pp. 706-7), where he emphasised the fact that Veblen coined the phrase ‘the process view’ in order to describe the growing influence of industrial society on thought processes. Veblen also wanted to convey the way in which this new industrial workmanlike perspective clashes with the old, traditional concern for and preoccupation with ‘mysteries or miracles, with conventions or customs, with dignities or decorums’ (p. 707).

his tools is the significant fact, in the other the machine or factory is all-important' (p. 65).

Humanity has thus moved from the beauty of medieval cathedrals to the ugliness of factory buildings. Effectively, according to Fox, the history of western civilisation has been a history of loss, a loss of beauty, dignity and nobility:

But where can we find the beauty in a factory town to serve as a model for inspiration? High, smoky chimney stacks, huddled rows of badly constructed houses, alike in their dreary monotonous ugliness, tell better than any words of the rawness of the life led there. The factory plants have obscured beauty and have come between man and a clear view of life just as the smoke from the chimneys have come between him and the sun [...] Mystery, beauty, reverence, awe, all hold little place in the factory worker's life, and he is poorer for the loss. It is not only the factory worker who suffers in this way but all who come under the domination of the machine. A slick, pitiful, commonplace vulgarity is the mark of our machine civilisation. (p. 76)

Fox wants to resist the 'human recoil' caused by the machine.³⁸ In order to safeguard the individual from being completely crushed by machine technology, medieval human values should be re-affirmed in literature as much as in life. Armed with these values, and in the name of preserving all things human, Fox seeks an accommodation with these irreversible machine forces, a necessary synthesis of opposites that would safeguard the humanity of 'man'.

Fox's attack on Futurism should be understood in the context of his attitudes towards machine civilisation. In order to counterbalance Futurist celebration of an all-triumphant machine, he advocates a literature that re-affirms what he sees as important values for the survival of humanity. The fact that these values hark back, in Ruskinian and Morrisite mode,

³⁸ 'The Human Recoil' is the title of chapter 4 in *The Triumphant Machine*, which relies on Veblen to develop a determinist and somewhat more defeatist conception of the domination of man by machinery. For example, Fox argues, with nothing to distinguish him from the naturalists (as in 'Factory Life'), that: 'He [the worker] ceases to struggle, submits, and shapes himself to the machine. So workshop realism is born' (p. 62); or: 'He sees only the validity of those ideas which fit in with this mechanical "process view". There is the making of an iron dogmatism here – a dogmatism which can be and is being applied to the whole life. It has a bearing on social thought, on religion, on politics, on literature, on history – on all those departments of human activity which are being crushed into the factory formula' (p. 64).

to a very distant past, idealised and misrepresented as a time when labour was happy building monuments for the church and aristocracy, seems to leave him undisturbed. Crucially, his idealism and nostalgia to days gone by lead him to over-determine the influence and historical role of machine technology, singling it out as the sole oppressive force in society while neglecting the social relations that determine its use. The result is that his social thought is deterministic and essentialist, interpreting the working class as a product moulded and shaped by machines, while limiting its scope for resistance and change to the pursuit of beauty, dignity, and nobility. The force of human agency is curtailed by, maybe even sacrificed to, idealist standards.

3.3.3 Contemporary Ugliness and Medieval Beauty

His fiction in the *NS* also deals with similar concerns, and machines and medievalism are central here as well. The representation of a factory is a point of contention between the protagonist, Dave, of Fox's short story 'The Dinner Hour' and an artist whom he meets sketching his factory from a distance. On seeing her drawing, he protests that ' "It isn't like that at all" [...] It's ugly – hideous" ': 'With his bitter loathing of the factory he was amazed at its pictured beauty as it grew beneath her fingers. The summer sky, the haze which hung over the marsh, the trees, all had given their tribute to turn this monster which was devouring youth and strength into something as romantic as a mediaeval castle – to a modern!'.³⁹ On his return to the factory, he feels oppressed and controlled by the machinery: 'The machines were clattering and grinding, belts slid along the ceiling and down over the pulleys like black

³⁹ R. M. Fox, 'The Dinner Hour', *NS*, 6 August 1927, pp. 535-7 (p. 536). References are given after quotations in the text.

shining snakes, twisting and coiling. He felt a horror of this blind industrial order indifferent to human desires and pain' (p. 536).⁴⁰

Dave is 'an unconscious worshipper of beauty' (p. 536), and he deeply resents the way in which his factory has gradually encroached on the surrounding countryside and 'beautiful woodland'. He describes this urban expansion in very strong terms, reminiscent of both Forster and Nesbit: 'a creeping miasma is advancing' (p. 536). Dave is a self-confessed dreamer, and his idealism shines through at the end: 'in spite of all the forces that were bent on making the world hideous, beauty would prevail' (p. 537).

Beauty is also central to the imagined Socialist future, and forms a key part of the 'The Strike Meeting', another 1927 *NS* short story by Fox. Here again one individual's dreams are paramount, and a worker's idealism and dreams for the future stand against the corruption of trade union leaders (bitterly felt after the Trade Union Congress's betrayal of the workers in the General Strike of 1926), the rhetoric of an aristocratic revolutionary, and the crude materialism of some of his fellow workers. Much resembling the ending of 'The Dinner Hour' ('beauty would prevail'), the conclusion of this piece also evokes a messianic confidence in the victory of the forces of beauty: ' "We have felt on our own bodies the marks of servitude. All our lives we have been kicked and cuffed and held as nought. Now we see a new world, and we are going to mould and shape it; to put our own lives into it to give it life, form and beauty [...] we may be broken in the task, but it shall rise!" ' .⁴¹

⁴⁰ Machine as monster is a common trope in working-class fiction, exemplified in another *NS* short story of the time by S. W. Hyde entitled 'The Boiler Shop' (4 February 1928, pp. 529-30): 'The boiler shop knew its power, but was aware of no limitations. It was a rude, wild monster. It was mighty and savage, it shouted and bellowed. The men who served it were like feeble priests ministering to an angry god' (p. 529). Sounds very much like Kington Parkes' depiction in 'Metlingham Heath' in 1913.

⁴¹ R. M. Fox, 'The Strike Meeting', *NS*, 5 February 1927, pp. 503-5 (p. 505). References are given after quotations in the text.

To suggest an alternative future other than that of capitalism is an admirable feat in itself. Yet it remains in the sphere of dream, unrelated to the immediate needs of the moment (the strike), existing as a rhetorical affirmation seeped in the confidence of future victory. In the post-General Strike era, Fox's conception of struggle seems to have changed. He seems to have moved away from his earlier engagement with the collective struggle over minutes and conditions in the factory (the actual 'class war' of 'Factory Life', his 1920 *NS* piece) and towards re-affirming the idealism of solitary figures, men who make their 'solitary way through the rapidly dispersing throng' (p. 505), dreaming of a future when beauty, dignity, and nobility will somehow prevail. Fox himself seems to be starkly aware of his own solitariness and idealism, as his autobiography shows: 'I had never been able to divest myself of the idea that there is beauty about life' and 'I was solitary, wrapped up in my dreams which no around me shared'.⁴² It is these components, the solitary worker and idealist values, that come to occupy a central place in his thought and fiction in the late 20s.

Fox's socialist drive to represent working-class life and literature is coupled with, and coloured by, a strong emphasis on the loss of idealist values. Crucially, his specific reading of working-class history as a loss of medieval harmony between 'man', his tools of production, and nature is also strongly echoed in the early years of the *NS*. In essence, it goes back to a founding debate in the history of the journal, examined in the first chapter of this thesis: the debate between country and city. Fox's socialist ideology seems to be much influenced by a dominant, early-Fabian trend represented by Walter Crane, Edith Nesbit, Hubert Bland, and J. C. Squire, the first literary editor of the *NS*. There is a clear reference to the early Fabians in Fox's autobiography, *Smoky Crusade*, where he acknowledges his intellectual debt to their ideas on the arts and their representation of the working class:

⁴² R. M. Fox, *Smoky Crusade* (London: Hogarth Press, 1937), p. 46, p. 48.

Romance was written for me in the crimson sunsets and the golden dawns. I saw it in the struggles of grim-faced factory men and the appeals of the suffragettes. Even in the factory – my iron-bound world of daily toil – while my fingers were at work my mind was filled with gorgeous day-dreams, vague yet pleasant, dreams such as those in drawings of the Socialist artist Walter Crane, where happy men and women dressed in flowing, impractical garments danced hand in hand towards the sunlight, or in the May Day cartoon of Will Dyson – which I had seen in the *Daily Herald* – of the workman rising from his knees, receiving the kiss of beauty on his brow.⁴³

Fox admires the process of beautifying and decorating working-class surroundings through recourse to the beautiful and noble in art, as was practised by literary-minded Fabian Socialists. Inspired in part by William Morris and Edward Carpenter, this arts-and-crafts socialism idealises the lost medieval past, where labour produced in harmony with nature and where beauty was an intrinsic part of labouring life.⁴⁴ It's against this nostalgic vision that this Foxian brand of socialism measures contemporary civilisation. As a result of commercialisation and large-scale industrialisation and machinofacture, harmony and co-existence between nature and human civilisation were shattered, resulting in machine becoming master of man.

This reading of history is informed by a specific set of attitudes towards urban civilisation that were central to Squire's early literary concerns. As literary editor of the *NS* from 1913 to 1920, he simultaneously published fiction portraying the harshness and 'ugliness' of urban industrial life alongside fiction that sang the praises of the countryside. In effect, he represented the city only to reject it for the country. In the 20s, Fox comes to re-engage with this structure of attitudes, central to the *NS* as a Fabian, fiction-publishing journal. By positing machine industry against medieval labour methods, he re-articulates what he sees as the negative impact of industrial technology on labour and contemporary

⁴³ Fox, *Smoky Crusade*, p. 144.

society. This mode of constructing industrial civilisation has clear ideological affinities with Fabian Socialism, as represented by Squire, and its espousal by Fox would certainly account for the journal's marked interest in publishing his work in its literary section.

Unlike Fox, however, others in this tradition completely lost touch with urban industrial culture, embraced an imagined countryside as substitute (an act of restitution by invention), and later became political reactionaries (like Squire). Fox responds very differently to the forces of industrialisation and mass production, in a way that clearly distinguishes him from Squire's own ideological trajectory and allows him to retain his radical political commitment towards the working class, and develop it into a commitment to the Irish Revolution, a subject which comes to preoccupy his writings from the 30s onwards.⁴⁵ Instead of escaping from industrialised urban society, he (perhaps regrettably) accepts it as an inevitable historical development (a materialist position thus far). His Fabian idealism shines through, however, when he suggests transforming contemporary culture and society by injecting it with the lost humanist values attributed to medieval times.

The publication of Fox's work on working-class culture and society is very significant in the history of the *NS*'s literary section. At a time when the working class again rises to a national presence as a political force, his writings testify to its gradual rise in the sphere of metropolitan culture as well.⁴⁶ His importance to the *NS* thus lies in the way he

⁴⁴ Relevant here is, for example, Morris's 'Why I Became a Socialist' or 'A Factory as It Might Be' or *A Dream of John Bull*.

⁴⁵ For example: *Rebel Irishwomen* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1935); *Green Banners: The Story of the Irish Struggle* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938); *James Connolly: The Forerunner* (Tralee: Kerryman, 1946). He also acted as Irish Correspondent for the *Nation* until its merger with the *NS*.

⁴⁶ Some more *NS* examples of working-class fiction published in the late 20s, on themes ranging from fanatic and obsessive clerks, to weddings and odd marriages, and to a farmer stealing a sack of potatoes in the country, include: R.M. Fox, 'Casuals in the City' (16 April 1927), pp. 12-13; E. G. Lee, 'The Acquittal', 28 May 1927, pp. 212-3; G. L. Gibson, 'A Pair of Silk Stockings', (9 July 1927), pp. 405-406; Michael Joyce, 'A Fireman's Wedding' (3 December 1927), pp. 244-5; Michael Joyce, 'A Vulgar Tragedy' (24 November 1928), pp. 220-21; Norman R. Collins, 'The Fanatic' (2 August 1930), pp. 540-41; Martin Armstrong, 'Mrs. Noah's Ark' (11 October 1930), pp. 12-3.

interprets this rise, effectively containing it within the ideological confines of Fabian Socialism and its attitudes towards labour and culture. It is fair to conclude that Fox's idealist admiration for medieval labour and society seems to have hampered his development of a materialist interpretation of history and qualified his socialist commitment towards the working class.

3.4.1 H. E. Bates's Emerging Map of the Countryside

1926 was a very important year for Bates, the year when he published both his first play, *The Last Bread*, and his first novel, *The Two Sisters*. *The Last Bread: A Play in One Act* was published by the Labour Publishing Company in its 'Plays for the People' series. It came out days before the General Strike and was widely read during the miners' strike that followed.⁴⁷ Set in a 'bare bedroom in the poorest part of a large industrial city', the play dramatises the severe poverty and hunger of an unemployed household and the struggle over the last remaining piece of bread in the house. As Monica Ewer acknowledges in her short introduction to the play: 'This is admittedly a grim little play, but not, I think, grimmer than reality. Of all tragedy that of the age-long struggle for existence is the one in which we are most concerned'.⁴⁸ In view of the fact that Bates is best known for his countryside fiction, it is important to emphasise his initial interest in urban/industrial problems. This interest in industrialisation and poverty does in fact resurface in his *Charlotte's Row* (1930), a novel set in a shoemaking factory town.

Two weeks after the appearance of *The Last Bread*, Bates's first novel, *The Two Sisters*, was published with the pioneering post-war publisher Jonathan Cape, having been rejected by eight previous publishers. This event marks the beginning of a long and fruitful relationship with Cape, mainly attributed to the fact that it employed the services of one of the most prominent publisher's readers and literary editors of the early twentieth century, Edward Garnett, of whom Henry Green wrote: 'For about forty years he had a hand, and a

⁴⁷ Another working-class author published by The Labour Publishing Company was Stacey W. Hyde. His collection of short stories, *Shopmates*, came out in 1924. For an informative account of the Company and its relationship to the long-time *NS* contributor G. D. H. Cole and the Labour Research Department (originally the Fabian Research Department, which had strong Guild Socialist leanings), see Pat Francis, 'The Labour Research Publishing Company 1920-1929', *History Workshop Journal*, 18 (Autumn 1988), 115-23.

⁴⁸ H. E. Bates, 'The Last Bread: A Play in One Act', *Plays for the People* (London: The Labour Publishing Company, 1926), p. iv.

very powerful hand, in most of the best that was written in England. A most retiring man, he spread his influence far and wide'.⁴⁹ Garnett edited and was associated with the publication and promotion of, to name only a few, Joseph Conrad, John Galsworthy, the Australian Henry Lawson, W. H. Hudson, Edward Thomas, W. H. Davies, Edith Nesbit, D. H. Lawrence (*Sons and Lovers* only), and the Irish Liam O'Flaherty and Sean O'Faolain, all of whom (excluding the first three) were at some stage published in the *NS*.⁵⁰

Significantly, Garnett was also a great admirer of modern Russian literature and was married to the pioneering translator of Russian literature Constance Garnett, who single-handedly translated (among others) Turgenev (15 volumes, 1894-1899), Dostoyevsky (12 volumes, 1912-1920), and Chekov (15 volumes, 1916-1923).⁵¹ Bates became good friends with Constance, sharing her love of the country and gardening, and her passion for Russian literature, especially admiring and being influenced by her work on Turgenev and Chekov.⁵² He even dedicated his second collection of short stories, *Seven Tales and Alexander* (1929), to her, inscribing her presentation copy with: 'who by her poetic genius began influencing

⁴⁹ H. E. Bates, *Edward Garnett* rev. by Henry Green, *NS*, 30 December 1950, p. 675.

⁵⁰ The amazing range of authors published under the imprint of Cape during Garnett's time there can be gleaned in a collection of short stories selected and introduced by him and entitled *Capajon: Fifty-four Short Stories Published 1921-1933* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933). What is striking about Garnett's selection is not only its geographical scope (Australia, South Africa, Britain, Ireland, and the United States), but also the fact that it includes nearly as many women as men contributors (ten women to fourteen men), as the following list shows: Mary Arden, Sherwood Anderson, Martin Armstrong, H. E. Bates, Kay Boyle, Louis Bromfield, Edmund Candler, Dorothy Canfield, A. E. Coppard, Ernest Hemingway, Laurence Housman, Sarah Orne Jewett, James Joyce, Aino Kallas, Henry Lawson, H. A. Manhood, Naomi Mitchison, Lorna Moon, Sean O'Faolain, Liam O'Flaherty, Katherine Susannah Prichard, Pauline Smith, Giovanni Verga, and Malachi Whitaker. 'Capajon' was Cape's telegraphic address.

⁵¹ In his *DNB* entry on Constance Garnett, H. N. Brailsford, editor of the Independent Labour Party organ *New Leader* (1922-1926) and regular political contributor to *NS* in the 30s, writes: 'To innumerable readers she revealed a new world and thanks chiefly to her translations the Russian classics exerted in the first half of the twentieth century a deep influence on English literature and thought'. For more information on the neglected achievement of Constance Garnett, see Charles A. Moser 'The Achievement of Constance Garnett', *The American Scholar*, 57 (Summer 1988), 431-38.

⁵² In his own *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey* (London: Michael Joseph, 1941), Bates writes of Constance's translations as being 'a superhuman achievement' (p. 120), having 'the most important influence on the English short story' (p. 119); he singles out the Turgenev and Chekov translations for particular praise for being 'the most important literary events' between the 1890s and the end of the Great War (p. 120).

my life before I lived; to which genius and to her unfailing friendship no less, this book is a tribute'.⁵³ Bates also developed a strong literary connection with Edward Garnett, who became his critic, editor, advocate and public promoter, as Bates himself acknowledges in his portrait *Edward Garnett*:

During all this time Garnett was doing for me that incomparable, rare and wonderful kind of service that Flaubert did for Maupassant. The youth from the country, happiest in the country, despising literary coteries and ideologies and schools, essentially an intuitive sensuous and not a thinking writer, was being carefully shaped, guided and nursed by the man of experience and sophistication from whom not all the cynicism and ingratitude of the literary world had taken the humanity and enthusiasm of new discovery.⁵⁴

Clearly, Garnett didn't only play a decisive role in launching Bates's literary career but also tried to steer him in a particular direction, towards the 'essential' and 'economic' in expression and the 'true' and 'real' in conception. For example, in his foreword to *The Two Sisters*, Garnett contrasts it with the 'ordinary novel' which has 'too many interests, activities and engagements, too much to attend to, too much to read and consider and too much to hear [...] crowded with an excess of detail, with a plethora of information and a congestion of comments'.⁵⁵ Garnett draws attention to episodes in the novel where Bates's 'artistic economy' is clearly demonstrated and praises the novel for its 'truth to essentials', especially beauty: 'One longs to get back to essentials, especially to the essential of beauty. And the element of beauty that our utilitarian civilisation pushes out more and more with its "tubes" and "wireless," with its newspapers and telephones and other disseminating, speeding-up mechanics of life, is an element that pervades *The Two Sisters*' (p. 8). As Garnett's

⁵³ Quoted in Peter Eads, *H. E. Bates: A Bibliographical Study* (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1990), p. 13.

⁵⁴ H. E. Bates, *Edward Garnett* (London: Parrish, 1950), p. 20.

⁵⁵ Edward Garnett, 'Foreword', in *The Two Sisters* by H. E. Bates (London: Jonathan Cape, 1926), pp. 7-10 (pp. 7-8). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

conclusion reaffirms, Bates can either go the way of ‘artistic economy’ and the ‘essential’, ‘the path of art endlessly difficult’, or take the easy ‘path of facile achievement’ (p. 10).

Bates’s method proved to be a sticking point and source of debate and conflict between him and Garnett in the late 20s, exactly when Bates’s sketches and short stories were beginning to appear (with Garnett’s help) in the *NS*, *Nation*, *Adelphi*, and *Manchester Guardian*. The matter came to a head when Garnett finally had the chance to read the manuscript of a second novel Bates had been writing for the last 8 months; he rejected and condemned it in no uncertain terms as the product of the ‘facile demon’ in Bates. The point was made to Bates in a letter Garnett wrote him on 5 September 1927.⁵⁶ The letter, worth discussing briefly, is extremely revealing not only because it gives a unique glimpse into the dynamics between author and editor but also for disclosing the way in which Garnett was trying to shape and mould Bates according to a clearly stated and detailed agenda of literary realism. Garnett didn’t only tell Bates what to write but how to write it as well. The following paragraph is worth quoting in full:

But the most disconcerting thing is that you’ve written it in the facile, flowing, over-expressive, half-faked style, gliding over the difficulties, not facing the real labour of realistic painting. All that I’ve condemned in your bad sketches – the generalities, the vague cynicism, the washy repetitions and the lack of firm outlines and exact touches – You’ve written it, I repeat, in the bad Batesian facile manner that you can turn on like a tap to cover up deficiencies. (p. 54, original form)

For Garnett, Bates’s characters have not been ‘realized’, ‘the real life in the farm’ and its ‘daily actualities’ have been ‘dodged’ (p. 56). He criticises him for not ‘giv[ing] us a close detailed realistic picture of farm life [...] I tell you again, those people, all of them should have been drawn as solid and actual as an old kitchen dresser – at work in the fields and in

⁵⁶ The long letter is quoted in full in Bates’s *Edward Garnett*, pp. 54-9. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

the house' (p. 56-7). Garnett is in fact telling Bates to draw people as accurately as inanimate objects are drawn, and adds: 'YOU've got to realize them [...] They've got to be objective' (p. 58). Garnett accuses Bates of not having learnt anything from him and, interestingly, he refers him back to the 'Foreword' of *The Two Sisters*:

*And why, why when I've cut up your bad sketches into small pieces and thrown them in your face, why why you start in on this unreal, long-winded, romantic, cynical style I can't understand [...] But you've stuffed in heaps, heaps and heaps of comments and reflections. If you had read page 9 of my Foreword you would see that instead of 'artistic economy' you've 'overloaded' the scenes without getting 'truth to essentials' [...] The whole spirit to work in is, I repeat, truth to reality and realisation.*⁵⁷ (p. 58)

Garnett concludes the letter by making it absolutely clear that what he calls 'Hardy romance and Conradesque methods' should be avoided. Most significantly, he offers Bates the Russians as a model to learn from and aspire towards: '*But remember, it's the essentials and artistic economy that count – as Turgenev wrote in Fathers and Children, and as Tchekhov wrote in The Party. It should be a story without a superfluous line – it's got to be true, true, true. Nothing but truth*' (p. 59, emphasis added).⁵⁸

Bates seems to have learned this lesson well when, in his own book on the short story, published just after his most fruitful period of writing in the 30s, he writes that: 'It is no longer necessary to describe; it is enough to suggest'.⁵⁹ Writers like Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway, and V. S. Pritchett seemed to him part of a new generation which has been 'relieved' of what he sees as the 'oppressive obligation' to 'describe', with the result

⁵⁷ Garnett's 'cutting up' and 'throwing out' resembles his work on Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*.

⁵⁸ George Jefferson, in his *Edward Garnett: A Life in Literature* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), writes: 'Edward carried out an insistent campaign to bring the genius of Russian writers to the notice of English novelists and to the reading public' (p. 163). Other writers who were encouraged to take the Russian realists as models were the Irish Liam O'Flaherty and Sean O'Faolain. Indeed: 'What Sean O'Faolain was to call Edward's adoration of the Russian realists permeated his relationships as advisor, and he urged the Russian example upon them' (p. 172).

⁵⁹ Bates, *The Modern Short Story*, p. 24. Next quotations is also from p. 24.

that their fiction (and short stories specifically) is ‘more simply, more economically, and more truthfully written’. It is significant that, fifteen years after Garnett’s letter, his literary standards and valuations are very much alive in Bates’s mind, and seem to have played a major part in defining and determining his conception of the modern, post-war writer.⁶⁰

As the relationship with Garnett indicates, the late 20s were difficult and formative years for Bates, but he was at least safe in the knowledge that if he could get a short story or novel past Edward Garnett it would certainly find a publisher. The process of making him into a less romantic, less Hardy-esque, and more Russian-realist author was well under way when his stories started appearing in the *NS*, Desmond MacCarthy being one of the London literary editors bombarded by Garnett with pieces by Bates to publish. In all, in the late 20s, Bates published five short stories in the *NS*, some of which show his emerging distinctive style and unique way of seeing the interwar English countryside.

3.4.2 Oppression and Desire: Bates’s *NS* Pieces

On 14 May 1926, two days after the TUC leadership had betrayed the solidarity of the Trade Union movement and called off the General Strike (leaving the miners to stand alone for a further seven months), Bates wrote to Garnett that like his shoemaking grandfather Lucas, and unlike his Liberal parents, he himself was a socialist: ‘I make friends only among the

⁶⁰ Considering Garnett’s widespread influence and strategic cultural position, there are (oddly enough) very few literary-critical studies of his work and editorial practices (and no *DNB* entry, although there are ones for his wife Constance and his son David Garnett). The studies that do exist tend to focus on his relationship with a single author, like: Cedric Watts, ‘Edward Garnett’s Influence on Conrad’, *The Conradian*, 21(Spring 1996), 79-91; or, Helen Baron, ‘Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* versus Garnett’s’, *Essays in Criticism*, 62 (October 1992), 265-78. A recent notable exception is James M. Cahalan, ‘Edward Garnett and the Making of Early Modernist Fiction’, *Lamar Journal of the Humanities*, 17 (Fall 1991), 41-52, which deals with Garnett’s insistence on compression and objectivity in fiction.

poor [...] The rest I feel bitter against and know they despise me'.⁶¹ On 20 May 1926, he wrote that 'I [...] write stories about oppressed people'.⁶² His first short story to be published in the *NS*, 'Never', in June 1926, had as its central themes social oppression and the continuing desire for change.

This story has a sombre, suffocating atmosphere. The woman protagonist, Nellie, wants to go away, to leave her village for London, to rid herself of monotony and boredom and be free. Yet, she can't manage this: 'Yes: it was all confused. She was going away: already she had said a hundred times during the afternoon. "I am going away ... I am going away. I can't stand it any longer."' But she had made no attempt to go'.⁶³ Day followed day and little changed. But there was something different about the day in which the story is set; this time she was really leaving. The narrative captures her doubts and hesitations, desperation and desire to act in order to change the circumstances of her life: 'Today she was going away; no one knew, but it was so. She was catching the evening train to London, was about to run away, to live by herself after all these years of imprisonment!' (p. 292). As she prepares meticulously for her flight, she ritualistically and continuously repeats her desire to escape, ' "I am going away" ', and adds: ' "No one will believe I've gone. I'm considered too meek for anything extraordinary to happen to me" ' (p. 292). In the end, she misses the last train to London and returns without even having had her absence noticed, hence the title,

⁶¹ Unpublished letter quoted in Dean R. Baldwin, *H. E. Bates: A Literary Life* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1987), p. 66. Bates is even more neglected than Garnett is, and Baldwin's biography, with its extensive use of unpublished letters and other primary material, is very welcome indeed. Although Bates's major writings have been reviewed on publication, academic critics have scandalously neglected his work. The following are three notable exceptions: Walter Allen, *The Short Story in English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); James Gordin, 'A. E. Coppard and H. E. Bates', in *The English Short Story 1880-1945: A Critical History*, ed. by Joseph M. Flora (Massachusetts: Twayne, 1985), pp. 113-41; and, Dennis Vanatta, *H. E. Bates* (Boston: Twayne, 1983).

⁶² Unpublished letter quoted in Baldwin, *Bates*, p. 66.

⁶³ H. E. Bates, 'Never', *NS*, 26 June 1926, pp. 291-3 (p. 292). References are given after quotations in the text. 'Never' was admired by V. S. Pritchett and included in his *The Oxford Book of Short Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

‘Never’, implying that she will never be able to escape. However, the title can cut both ways and can also mean that she will never give up or stop trying to leave, as suggested in the last sentence of the story where she reaffirms her wish for change: ‘ “Some day! ... Some day!” ’(p. 293).

The issue of unfulfilled but persistent desire also occupies a central place in another of Bates's *NS* short stories, ‘The Comic Actor’. Here, even though the protagonist, ‘the poorest and most unfortunate farmer in the district’, does have a comic, self-delusional, and dreamy edge to him, his strong yearning and desire to succeed as an actor is asserted in the story.⁶⁴ His pain and disappointment at failing is achingly present, and it is only by lying and pretending to have succeeded that he keeps his hopes (and illusions) alive: ‘Only by lying could he defend and soothe himself. Something thick and warm fell about his heart if he lied’ (p. 368).

A sense of *dejection* is ever-present in Bates's *NS* stories, and that word is used to describe, for example, both Nellie's feelings at failing to escape her condition in ‘Never’ and the feelings of one particular family and their train companions on their return from a seaside holiday in ‘The Holiday’, another *NS* piece: ‘There too were the reflections of the other occupants of the van, sitting and standing about her in dejected attitudes, watching the rain, eating, mournfully playing cards and talking in low whispers, as if sound were forbidden’.⁶⁵ Here again longing for something which is elsewhere, unattainable, or lost is also re-affirmed. While sitting on the train back from a family holiday, the main protagonist looks at his wife and infant child with an ‘air of resignation and perform[s] again all his old tricks for

⁶⁴ H. E. Bates, ‘The Comic Actor’, *NS*, 29 June 1929, pp. 366-8 (p. 366). References are given after quotations in the text. ‘A Comic Actor’ appeared in *The Best Short Stories of 1930: English*, ed. by Edward J. O'Brien (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930).

killing time' (p. 363). His sense of loss is emphasised when, while looking at some advertisement, a barely audible note of injustice is sounded: 'his eyes were constantly resting on the violent colours of the advertisement, and he remembered vividly the green sea, the windy evenings and warm days of the week that had passed. Many times he asked himself: Why should it ever end, where was the justice of it?' (p. 364). The end of the short story ritualistically re-affirms his desire to be elsewhere, where he could be happy, satisfied and fulfilled:

The weariness and strain of the journey slipped away, too, and he began to know no regret or worry but only a dull longing, resembling an ache, the longing for the sea again, the warm, dark nights, and the low noise of the waves over the murmur of the crowd. (p. 364)

The psychology of Bates's characters is very much at the heart of his concerns in these short pieces. The individuals he depicts are in one form or another oppressed by their social and material circumstances. They are stuck and struggling, their desires consuming yet unfulfilled. Another dimension to their oppression and social imprisonment is that it is experienced individually not collectively. His characters are alone and lonely.

These issues are centrally addressed in another of Bates's *NS* short stories, 'The Idiot'. Here he depicts the tragic and painful mental separation of a so called 'village idiot' named Taddo, for whom the surrounding environment is perceived as hostile and is experienced as a threat. He is mocked by the village boys in chapel, laughed at and embarrassed. Taddo thus experiences what is a seemingly collective activity (the congregation of chapel goers) as a personal nightmare of 'sweating and trembling with

⁶⁵ H. E. Bates, 'The Holiday', *NS*, 1 January 1926, pp. 363-4 (p. 363). References are given after quotations in the text. For a comical, less existential conception of a holiday see the amusing depiction of Mr. Bat, a city clerk, and his wife in R. E. Warner, 'Holiday', *NS*, 29 March 1930, pp. 804-5.

fear'.⁶⁶ Here again 'dejection' is used to describe the condition of one of Bates's characters. The story makes it clear that Taddo experiences his surroundings as a set of threatening forms and confusing shadows: 'The chapel seemed very dark, full of green shapes which made soft collisions with each other. These and the words of the preacher, which he imagined to be accusing him, made him long to be outside again' (p. 44). Taddo grows 'even more afraid' and sees in the faces around him 'only malice and hostility', and a terrifying image is used to describe his condition: 'like a girl faced with rape' (p. 44). While rushing out of the chapel in great horror, he mistakenly ends up with a shilling from the collection plate, is subsequently consumed by guilt and returns it to the unsuspecting preacher. At the end, the actual thunderstorm outside and Taddo's own mental storm pass away and 'the calming earth, the sweet air, the fresh-smelling trees and the stars appearing in the broken sky like inquisitive children, were all whispering to him: "The Storm is over, the storm is over."/ And he began to sing' (p. 44).

'The Idiot' is striking for its depiction of the world through alienated eyes. Taddo's inward life, his mental state, feelings, thoughts, fears, and panics are what the story is about. What could have been a sentimental, nostalgic story about the author's fond and funny memories of a 'village idiot' turned out in Bates hands to be a deep, psychologically-realist portrait of mental alienation seen through the eyes of the 'idiot' himself.

The countryside that Bates represents in his fiction is alive with people, their social problems, and their relationship to their surroundings. As Glen Cavaliero argues in his impressive survey *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel, 1900-1939*, for Bates the countryside means a peopled landscape: 'The background of the Nene valley, beautifully

⁶⁶ H. E. Bates, 'The Idiot', *NS*, 23 October 1926, pp. 43-4 (p. 44). References are given after quotations in the text.

described though it is, remains a background; people are more important in these novels [Bates's 30s novels] than landscape'.⁶⁷ His countryside is a place which is lived in and experienced as lived (not merely imagined) by its inhabitants, an active, social space. Unlike many twentieth century rural writers who came to the country to escape the strains of the city, like W. H. Hudson, H. J. Massingham, Edward Thomas, S. L. Bensusan and the Georgian poets, Bates was of the country and wrote about it as he saw it and without that Georgian 'inrush of alien imagery: that set of ideas about the "rural" and the "pastoral", filtered through a version of the classical tradition [...] a deep if conventional intellectual conviction: an eyeglass that was lifted, deliberately and proudly, to the honestly observing eye'.⁶⁸ Crucially, Bates's countryside is unmediated by such a version of the rural tradition that generates a 'part-imagined, part-observed rural England'.⁶⁹ It can certainly be argued that his working-class origins coupled with his formative and defining encounter with Russian realism, with its strong emphasis on 'artistic economy', 'essentials', and 'truth', directed him away from the bourgeois fantasy world of the Georgians, their literary allusions, and timeless images of the countryside, away, indeed, from their 'strange formation in which observation, myth, record and half-history are deeply entwined'. Bates was thus, essentially, better placed to develop a 'realist' way of looking at the countryside. Such a different conception of the countryside is clearly evoked in his novels and short stories and can also be

⁶⁷ Glen Cavaliero, *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel, 1900–1939* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 196.

⁶⁸ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973; repr. London: The Hogarth Press, 1993), p. 255. Bensusan, prolific writer, and author of the popular Marshland stories, was a regular contributor to the *NS* on countryside matters (from birds to rural economy) since its foundation in 1913, throughout the 20s, and to the early 30s. H. J. Massingham was a pivotal figure in the 'Back to the Land' movement, weekly contributor to the *Nation and Athenaeum* (1916–1924), the *Field* (1938–1951), and occasionally to the *NS* (roughly from 1914 to the late 1920s). For an assessment of his writings see essay on him in W. J. Keith, *The Rural Tradition: William Cobbett, Gilbert White, and other Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1975). For a *NS* example of the countryside as healer of post-war wounds see R. H. Bruce Lockhart, 'Behind a War Mask', *NS*, 144 April 1928, pp. 12–3. See also Sisley Huddleston, 'The Shepherd's Call', *NS*, 26 January 1929, pp. 495–6.

⁶⁹ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 261. Next quotation is also from p. 261.

seen at work in his essays and commentaries on the countryside published regularly in the *Spectator* in the 30s, some of which were collected and published under the title *Country Life*. Here he distances himself unequivocally from the ‘largely poeticised or sentimentalised [...] rarely realistic or objective’ interest in the countryside and affirms the (historical) fact that the English countryside is very much man-made:

The countryside of England is, perhaps more than any other countryside in the world, man-made. Many of its most beautiful features – notably its woods, hedgerows and green fields – are the results of man-made systems of life, and today its character and beauty are no less man-made and man-sustained.⁷⁰

Bates’s conception of the countryside, clearly demonstrated in his novel *The Fallow Land* (1932), accounts for both ‘nature’ and ‘society’ within an active, changing history. While acknowledging the ‘charm of Springtime and the call of the blackbird’ (p. vii), he is deeply concerned with ‘decent wages, decent sanitation, and decent education’, ‘better rural housing, better agricultural wages, better farming’ (p. vii), and the general improvement of the standards of living in the countryside made possible by ‘mechanical invention’ and what he calls the ‘revolution science’. He argues that the twentieth century, through the application of science (and he mentions: gas, electric light, systems of heat radiation, the motor-car, the railway-engine, the concrete road, etc.), has qualitatively changed human existence and has had a tremendous impact on the countryside: ‘science has made possible for us, of the twentieth century, the easiest, safest, most comfortable, most accessible, most equitable and most varied kind of country life that has ever been known in England’ (p. vii). Crucially, Bates’s narrative of a developing, improving countryside, brought about by ‘mechanical invention’ and the expansion of schools and education, is clearly echoed in Williams’s own

⁷⁰ H. E. Bates, ‘Foreword’, in *Country Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1943; repr. Bath: Chivers Press, 1989), pp. v-viii (p. vi, p. vii). References are given after quotations in the text.

family experience of the same period of things getting better: 'the villages, now, were less oppressive and less deprived; there was the vote, there were the trains, there were the schools'.⁷¹ This is certainly a very different structure of feeling from the one expressed by the likes of Hudson and Thomas and their Georgian fellow-travellers. The countryside here is not invented or imagined, but actual, historical and social, and it is very much to Bates's credit that he could see it in those terms. The fact that he has a distinctive outlook on the countryside is also noted by Cavaliero, who argues that the rural novel in his hands changes and becomes something quite different: 'From being a genre, a specific literary product, it becomes a means of furthering genuine understanding of the countryman, his problems and attitudes'.⁷²

In the late 20s, Bates (born in 1905) was still in his early twenties and his journey was just beginning. But even as early as his *NS* pieces, his distinctive, emerging way of looking at the countryside is strongly registered. In the 30s, his relationship with the *NS* is consolidated by his friendship with the new literary editor David Garnett (Edward's son) and his contributions to the journal triple in number. In fact, he very much blossoms in the 30s. Of the summer of 1931 he himself has written: 'I now began to write, in a way that had not seemed possible before, of my native valley and its sturdy, independent, downright people. I suddenly developed. There began a decade of country stories and books of description and discursive comment on country affairs [numbering more than 40 in all]. The creative spirit, suddenly freed, had a whole new world of ecstatic exploration'.⁷³ Indeed, with novels like *The Fallow Land* (1932), *The Poacher* (1935), *Spella Ho* (1938), and short-story collections like *My Uncle Silas* (1939) and *Thirty Tales* (1934, issued in Cape's popular *The Traveller's*

⁷¹ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 257.

⁷² Cavaliero, *The Rural Tradition*, p. 200.

Library), and through his regular *Spectator* column⁷⁴, Bates becomes a writer of widespread influence and popularity in Britain of the 30s, as much a part of the decade as Spender and Auden. It was indeed the power and potency of his early *NS* stories that pointed him towards developing a new fictional portrayal of the English countryside.

⁷³ Bates, *Edward Garnett*, p. 72.

⁷⁴ Bates wrote the 'Country Life' column from 26 April 1935 to 24 October 1941.

3.5.1 Women of the Late 20s

Women fiction's was severely under-represented in the pages of the *NS* throughout the period of 1913-1939. Out of 520 short stories published in that period only 78 were by women, a mere 15%. The picture is also quite bleak for poetry contributions – sometimes thought of as the main zone of late-Victorian/Edwardian women's literary production. In fact, out of the 805 poems published in the *NS* from 1913 to 1939 only 81 were by women, less than 10%. Women were also nearly absent from every other category one cares to name in the journal: editorial staff, regular journalistic contributions and reviewing (whether political or literary). Indeed out of these categories only in literary reviewing were women less absent more often, although they still remained scandalously under-represented. The only regular contributions in this field came from Rebecca West who wrote 'Notes on Novels' for some two years beginning in 1920, and from Naomi Mitchison and Elizabeth Bowen who were frequent book reviewers in the 1930s.⁷⁵ The *NS* was very much a male journal, which mostly published male writers and was never really interested in promoting either fiction or poetry by women.

However, such low percentages can sometimes hide the existence of exceptionally good years for women's contributions in the *NS*. 1913 is one such year, and in it one quarter of the short stories published by J. C. Squire were by women – 17 out of 68. Many pieces by E. Nesbit, Angela Gordon, and Sylvia Lynd were published in this year. Astonishingly, and even though the number of poetry contributions by women in 1913 was pathetically low (2

⁷⁵ West was probably the best novel reviewer the *NS* ever had between the wars. She reviewed and promoted the work of many woman novelists including: May Sinclair (*The Romantic*, 16 October 1920, pp. 50-52; *Anne Severn and the Fieldings*, 2 December 1922, pp. 270-72); Sheila Kay-Smith's *Joanna Godden*, and other women novelist on 1 October 1921, pp. 706-8; Katharine Mansfield (*The Garden Party*, 18 March 1922, p. 678); Storm Jameson (*The Clash*, 27 May 1922, p. 213); and Virginia Woolf (*Jacob's Room*, 4 November 1922, pp. 142-4). She also reviewed D. H. Lawrence (*Women in Love*, 9 July 1921, pp. 388-390). Her reviews have yet to be collected and published.

out of 52), 1913 does in fact contain more short stories by women than all the years of Desmond MacCarthy's literary editorship put together, from 1920-28. In nearly a whole decade he only managed to publish 11 short fiction pieces by women (out of 135 contributions in all), with none appearing in 1921, 1922, and 1923. His complete neglect of women writers can also be seen in the fact that the year after he finally left (1930) contains not only more poems by women than he ever published in a tenure of nearly a whole decade (16 for his 11) but it also has more than two-thirds the number of short stories (8) that he did managed to publish.⁷⁶

MacCarthy's pathetic record on women is clearly related to the fact that in the first year of his editorship he unequivocally declared that women were intellectually and creatively inferior to men. His statement was made in the context of a review he wrote of Arnold Bennett's *Our Women: Chapters on the Sex-Discord* to which Virginia Woolf responded in two letters entitled 'The Intellectual Status of Women' (9 & 16 October 1920), a title which came to refer to the ensuing debate between her and MacCarthy over his views on women. In his review of Bennett, MacCarthy states that 'the fact that women are inferior to men in intellectual power, especially in that kind of power which is described as creative [...] stares one in the face'.⁷⁷ For him women are inferior to men in every form of creativity, and he names the following: literature, novel writing, painting and sculpture, criticism, philosophy, and scientific discovery. This fact becomes apparent, he adds, to anybody who cares to examine the evidence: 'I cannot conceive anybody who considers facts impartially coming to any other conclusions [...] on the whole intellect is a masculine speciality' (p.

⁷⁶ Indeed, 1930 is the only year in which the number of poems by women exceeds 10. The literary section was edited by Clennell Wilkinson and then R. Ellis Roberts. The latter's most famous recruit was Stella Benson (see chapter 6).

704). MacCarthy even declares that this is a static situation and supports Bennett when he says that ‘no amount of education and liberty of action will sensibly alter it’. In her response, Woolf takes issue with MacCarthy over this point exactly: ‘My difference with Affable Hawk is not that he denies the present intellectual equality of men and women. It is that he, with Mr Bennett, asserts that the mind of woman is not sensibly affected by education and liberty; that it is incapable of the highest achievements; and that it must remain for ever in the condition in which it now is’.⁷⁸ As she points out, MacCarthy is effectively asserting that women are inherently and eternally inferior to men.

There is clearly very little incentive or interest for an editor who strongly believes that women are simply not as creative as men are and can never be so, to publish fiction by women. The *NS*, as a result, fails consistently to tap into the progressive interwar trend of recognising and acknowledging women as equal cultural producers, despite the previous decade’s raging suffrage campaigns for women’s equality and the wartime shattering by women workers of a foundational masculine myth about industrial ‘work’ naturally being an exclusive male preserve.⁷⁹ MacCarthy’s response in the context of these social and political changes is downright reactionary. Having gained access to parliamentary democracy, he seems to have been adamant in keeping women out of the realm of ‘culture’. He consistently chose to exclude them from the *NS* even though there were a great many women writers

⁷⁷ Desmond MacCarthy (as Affable Hawk), ‘Books in General’, 2 October 1920, p. 704. References are given after quotations in the text.

⁷⁸ Virginia Woolf, ‘Correspondence’, *NS*, 16 October 1920, pp. 45-6 (p. 46). The whole exchange has been reprinted in Virginia Woolf, *A Woman’s Essays, Selected Essays: Volume One*, ed. by Rachel Bowlby (London: Penguin, 1992).

⁷⁹ For informative, class-differentiated accounts of women in 20s Britain see Noreen Branson, *Britain in the Nineteen Twenties*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975); and Sheila Rowbotham’s more recent and excellent decade by decade coverage of women’s lives (with sections on ‘Politics’, ‘Work’, ‘Daily Life’, and ‘Sex’) *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States* (London: Viking, 1997; repr. London: Penguin, 1999). See also John Lucas’s chapter ‘Women after the War: The Familial and the Feral’ in his *The Radical Twenties*.

active in Britain at the time, arguably many more than at any other previous period in history. The long list includes Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, Nancy Cunard, May Sinclair, Rose Macaulay, Katherine Mansfield, Charlotte M. Mew, Dorothy Richardson, Antonia White, Rebecca West, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Winifred Holtby, Cecily Hamilton, to name but a few.⁸⁰ In addition, from 1920 onwards the work of many women writers was being disseminated and brought to public notice by Lady Rhondda's weekly review *Time and Tide*, which published, among much else, work by Woolf, West, and E. M. Delafield (author of *Diary of a Provincial Lady* (1930) which originated as diary entries in the magazine).⁸¹ Yet, in spite of the fact that Desmond MacCarthy didn't think much of this great post-war activity around women's writing and fiction, a few women writers did manage to get published in the *NS* in the late 20s.

3.5.2 Women of the Riviera

As I noted in earlier chapters, the late 20s were exceptionally active times in the history of the *NS*, which was then very similar in scope and diversity to the pre-war period. Far more fiction was published at the end of the decade than at the beginning, and from many more diverse sources. Indeed, women's fiction is very much a late 20s development in the period after 1918 in the *NS*. Together with pieces by Winifred Holtby on South Africa there appear a handful of contributions by Rebecca West, Faith Compton Mackenzie, and Antonia White,

⁸⁰ See Nicola Beauman's groundbreaking *A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914-1939* (London: Virago, 1983). For a more recent account, dedicated 'To the forgotten and silenced makers of modernism', see *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); and, more recently, Anthea Trodd, *Women's Writing in English: Britain 1900-1945* (London: Longman, 1998).

⁸¹ For an account of the journal's early years see Dale Spender, ed., *Time and Tide Wait For No One* (London: Pandora, 1984).

dealing predominantly with the newly found world of drugs, travel, and opportunity of the Bright Young Things.

West is a good place to start. Her documentary 'Pages from a Riviera Diary' describes scenes, events, and encounters she had with people in a 'colony of wealthy expatriates', from the middle-aged woman desperately trying to buy romance to the drugged marquis and his wife Rosie.⁸² West is very sharp and precise in her judgements, and of the French aristocratic couple she says that they 'showed the futility of these attempts to make life more interesting by administering doses of grotesquerie to the nervous system' (p. 551). Drugs, drug taking, and drug smuggling from Marseilles are at the heart of West's Riviera piece. The picture she draws is of a bored and boring expatriate community whose main and most exciting preoccupation is drugs: 'I suppose there can be nothing more exotic than the smoking of opium. She had submerged herself in that exoticism. But she remained a bore, a commonplace bore, who twaddled about servants like any good wife of Surbiton' (p. 551).

This 'business of drugs', as West calls it, leads her on to the topic of New York, she having visited it a couple of weeks earlier. Here drugs again have central stage. She gives an account of a Bessie Smith Revue at the Lafayette Theatre in which a 'Negro' had sung about 'snow' (slang for cocaine): ' "I wish I were floating away on a beautiful cloud of snow" ' (p. 552). West shows great admiration and enthusiasm for Bessie Smith, and she describes her voice and appearance in great detail: 'She is a Georgian woman, a country girl, of very pure African blood and the simplest upbringing, who is amazingly beautiful notwithstanding a weight of sixteen stone or so [...] She has a voice the like of which I have never heard before. It is as if two voices were singing in her throat, one timid and female and victorious,

⁸² Rebecca West, 'Pages from a Riviera Diary', *NS*, 28 August 1926, pp. 551-3 (p. 551). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

one aggressive and male and defeated' (p. 552).⁸³ The New Yorkers to whom West was telling this were incredulous and had never heard of Bessie Smith, even though West does make it quite clear that she is as well known as Yvette Gilbert and Marie Lloyd. West blames the ignorance of her companions on American segregationism, on social barriers unsurmounted: 'Posts, telegrams, cables, wireless, have annihilated material limitations, but the complicated neuroses of modern civilisation set up psychological limitations that are not to be broken down by material inventions' (p. 552).

The significance of this piece, one that is apparent to its contemporary readers, lies in what it says about being a middle-class woman novelist in the late 20s: travelling to the continent alone to write; writing in national magazines in Britain of her travel experiences abroad, and openly discussing drugs and drug taking; and going to New York and listening to Southern blues. This is very much a metropolitan bourgeois woman's experience, where a sense of travel, independence, and widening social and cultural horizons is vividly conveyed. It epitomises the evolving post-war change in women's lives; a legacy of suffrage and wartime changes much more felt by bourgeois than working-class women of the period.⁸⁴

Another woman writer who charted the experiences of the British traveller abroad was Faith Compton Mackenzie. She published 3 short stories on this theme in the *NS* in the late 20s. Faith was wife of Sir Edward Compton Mackenzie, author of the famous *Extraordinary Women* (1928). They both loved islands and spent a lot of time on Capri and in Southern Italy. All her 3 *NS* stories are set in Spiaggia and tell of meetings and encounters

⁸³ Her encounter with Bessie Smith is unfortunately left out of Victoria Glendinning's *Rebecca West: A Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), although her visits to the Riviera are well documented. For more information on 'The Empress of the Blues' Bessie Smith and her ambivalent position as a successful black singer in a segregated America, see Rowbotham, *A Century of Women*, pp.159-60, and p. 645. Bessie Smith died after being refused treatment in a white hospital after a car crash in Mississippi in 1937.

⁸⁴ For changing status of women, their appearance and new forms of behaviour, see, for example, Branson, *Britain in the Nineteen Twenties*, pp. 208-9.

between the international clientele of this exclusive resort. Boris Ivanovitch Petrov, for example, is from Russia and comes to the island after fleeing Siberia to Paris. He is ill-fortuned and a poet, and sits all day ‘writing poetry on his little terrace in an exquisite hand, and waiting for a job which never came [...] Boris used to sit for hours in a yogi-like trance, contemplating the vivid sea and landscape that stretched before his terrace’.⁸⁵ Being broke, Boris is forced to exchange his suit for rent and is left heartbroken as a result. The story dramatises his loneliness and yearning: ‘He was never meant for a bohemian life, for he was domesticated, and his longing for a home was beyond ordinary longings’.

Tragedy is also quite pronounced in another of Mackenzie’s short pieces, ‘Mandolinata’, which tells the story of Kolya, son of a rich Eastern-European Jew ‘who had early shown a disinclination for work of any kind, a disinclination that had been indulged and even encouraged by his doting parents, who, after giving him an expensive education, had supplied funds for luxurious vagrancy’.⁸⁶ In his ‘search for Nirvana’ (p. 611), Kolya ends up in Spiaggia when his father finally decides to stop giving him money. As a result, he ‘sunk into a state of melancholy’ (p. 611). He tries but fails to commit suicide and comes to be known on the island as *Il Signorin’ Suicidio*. In fact, suicide becomes his only preoccupation: talking about it, telling people of his intentions to go through with it, planning it, failing to do it, and using it as an excuse to extract more money from his father. Near the end of the piece he exclaims: ‘ “Why can I find nothing worth while? My life is a wilderness; I wonder and wonder about in it and arrive nowhere” ’ (p. 612). The story finally ends with his suicide.

⁸⁵ Faith Compton Mackenzie, ‘The Suit’, *NS*, 30 July 1927, pp. 507-8 (508). Next quotations are from p. 508.

⁸⁶ Faith Compton Mackenzie, ‘Mandolinata’, *NS*, 25 August 1928, pp. 611-3 (p. 611). References are given after quotations in the text.

As in West's Riviera piece, the sense of futility and waste is ever present here. So is the sense of travel, desire, search, and loss. Mackenzie's characters are constantly worried and agonising over something, and if they are happy it is only temporary, as her third piece shows. 'La Bonne Mine' is set in pre-war Europe and evokes the careless sense of freedom and opportunities offered by bohemian life on Spiaggia: 'That's how it was on Spiaggia. Life was uncertain; something flashed and was gone. Hardly a memory – so uncertain and eventful was existence in that little city of pleasure by the sea. They went and forgot, and you stayed and forgot, because something else happened so quickly'.⁸⁷

Such an image is only evoked to be undermined by the narrator, and Gluck, the story's main (Prussian) protagonist decides unexpectedly to stay on rather than leave. He pursues and falls in love with two daughters of a Prince Marini, who, as the narrator comments, has been gradually losing his fortune and pride. As a result, his two daughters, Grazie and Mafalda, never had the benefit of French and English governesses and only received the most basic of convent schooling. Theirs is another story of aristocratic decline, intensified by the sense of doom looming over the place, it being the Spring of 1914: 'we sat a moment while somewhere near, Destiny stirred' (p. 326). Gluck declares his anti-war feelings and his worries continue to increase as summer nears. He leaves Spiaggia in July and is never heard from again after he reaches Germany, leaving the narrator to wonder whether he had survived the war at all.

There is very little that is pleasant about the encounters Mackenzie describes in her *NS* short stories. They tell stories of decadence and gradual decline with only the narrator remaining firmly outside the tragi-comic downwards spiral she describes. She is calm,

⁸⁷ Faith Compton Mackenzie, 'La Bonne Mine', *NS*, 16 June 1928, pp. 325-6 (p. 325). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

observant, and somewhat detached from the lives and stories of the foreigners who surround her. Whether it is the Prussian Gluck or the Russian poet, her characters belong to a specific class of people who are 'disinclined' to work and tend to go around Europe searching for a spiritual home that they continuously fail to find. Their lives seem to result from a primary failure, to connect, to commit, to find, to settle; and, hence, their floating about from one place to another. West's aristocratic drug-taking couple would have fitted in nicely in Mackenzie's Spiaggia, although West is more critical and judging of the life she sees around her.

This attitude towards flight and travel portrayed in Mackenzie's *NS* short stories is part of the post-war trend among many British intellectuals to leave England and live either permanently or regularly abroad, a socio-cultural pattern epitomised by the eternal traveller D. H. Lawrence. Paul Fussell has examined it in great detail in his *Abroad*. Edward Compton Mackenzie, Faith's husband, though not mentioned by Fussell, is very much a part of the travelling interwar British intelligentsia. After serving in the Royal Marines in 1915 on the Dardanelles expedition and getting injured and emotionally strained by the war, Mackenzie becomes an avid traveller in Europe, spending a lot of time on his beloved islands of Capri, Herm, Jethou, and Barra.⁸⁸ For Fussell, such longing for the Diaspora, the interwar wish to be abroad, is one of the signals of literary modernism in Europe, one that seems to come out of the trenches: 'The fantasies of flight and freedom which animate the imagination of the 20s and 30s and generate its pervasive images of travel can be said to begin in the trenches'.⁸⁹ As

⁸⁸ See his *DNB* entry by Christina Foyle published in 1986.

⁸⁹ Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 4. See also 'Somewhere the Good Place' in Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 377-418. The *NS* did publish some travel accounts, and here the sketches of J. B. Morton in the late twenties are relevant. With their emphasis on out-of-the-way villages on the continent, they present an interesting contrast to Faith Mackenzie's cosmopolitan fiction. See, for example, Morton's 'The Hag

Faith Mackenzie's *NS* pieces show, she shares and has registered in her fiction the post-war dominant sense of unsettledness, restlessness, flight, worriedness, and longing for a different home, which, as the next short story shows (and as Bates's *NS* stories before showed), was also very evident in fiction set at home.

of Auvergne', *NS*, 25 May 1929, pp. 213-4; and 'The Old Man of Aragon', *NS*, 18 January 1930, pp. 467-8. Morton was the 'Beachcomber' of the daily 'By the Way' column of the *Daily Express* from 1924-1975.

3.5.3 Oppressed Young Things

‘Strangers’ by Antonia White is relevant to this discussion, and is unique in being the only short story published by a woman during the MacCarthy era which deals exclusively with a woman’s feelings, emotions, and psychology. Published three years after Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), ‘Strangers’ is also about the consciousness of one woman, Mrs. Ferraby. The narrative mode is realist (and less impressionistic than Woolf’s), chronicling the protagonist’s life and responses to events around her. Like Mrs Dalloway, Mrs Ferraby leads a sheltered bourgeois life. The ringing phone at the opening of the piece finds her playing bridge. The voice at the other end of the line informs her that her husband has been involved in a car crash and that she must make her way to the hospital immediately. ‘All her life Joan Ferraby had had a name for being competent and level-headed. Habit did not desert her now. Quietly and composedly she dismissed her bridge-party, extended a pale cheek to each member, promised to telephone the next day’.⁹⁰ She is very composed and restrained, a habit also reflected in the way she dresses herself: ‘Dressing was to her more of a public duty than a private pleasure. Her clothes were always immaculate, always unexciting. She had read in a book of Father Benson’s that to be the best dressed woman in any assembly may be a Vocation and had applied it to herself. She dressed to please her husband, to prove that one may be comely and a Catholic’ (p. 80). Yet beneath her Catholicism, sense of propriety and duty, and calm public persona rage doubts and hesitations: ‘“So many nurses are Catholics,” she said to herself, fighting with her disgust’ (p. 80). While standing at her husband’s bedside, she is again reminded of her duty to him by a picture of the Virgin Mary, and is moved to feel that ‘she must say the fifteen decades’ (p. 80). Again she gets distracted and is

⁹⁰ Antonia White, ‘Strangers’, *NS*, 28 April 1928, pp. 80-81 (p. 80). References are given after quotations in the text.

reminded of the last time she had to say the full fifteen, when her brother Hugh died in the trenches. ‘Hugh kept coming back into her mind. The wound of twelve years ago had begun to throb and ache. In vain she kept saying to herself. “My husband – Jim – is lying there dying. We have been married eleven years. We love each other”’ (p. 80). She gives up trying to say her prayers. Her thoughts are dominated by the loss of Hugh and the permanent pain it left. She then remembers how kind and supportive her husband was after Hugh’s death and becomes calmly grateful to him. Yet, how to bridge the deep chasm between herself and Jim, if at all possible:

Jim had never understood her. They both took that for granted. For the first time it occurred to her that she might not have understood him. His queer passion for speed. It meant something to him, merely moving quickly from place to place. She had laughed at him so often for it. Oh! Quite kindly. As you laugh at a child [...] “I’d like to go on till I’m burnt up,” he had said in a funny apologetic voice, “Breakfast in Liverpool – Lunch in Aberdeen –” The words had trailed away into a laugh under her look. (p. 81)

Her Catholicism gives her a sense of ‘power, of swiftness, of lightness’ (p. 81), but still prevents her from sharing Jim’s speed and travel, his restlessness and flight. When she realises at the end that she has been mistakenly standing beside the wrong bed and that the person under the bandages was not Jim, she feels that even in death she was unable to catch him: ‘So he had eluded her after all’ (p. 81).

The deep-seated conflicts between religion and flight, duty and freedom, preservation and burn-up, are repeatedly played out in ‘Strangers’. The sacrificial, dutiful, restrained Mrs Ferraby hasn’t yet been able to break out of ‘the angel in the house’ mould. She hasn’t yet lashed out against her role and religion, which she is clearly uncomfortable with and struggling against. Jane Dunn, White’s recent biographer, nicely shows White’s struggle to escape religion. After she lapsed in 1926 she still experienced nagging doubts and

hesitations, never really succeeded in rejecting it completely, and came back to belief in later life: 'Antonia attempted to liberate herself from the fears, to disconnect from the prescriptions and prohibitions of catholicism [...] She was to remain within this spiritual battleground, outside the Church, for fifteen years. Unhappy within it, lost without it, lacerating herself with doubts'.⁹¹ 'Strangers' successfully captures White's growing disillusionment with religion as well as her inability to let go of it completely as a life-ordering set of 'prescriptions and prohibitions'. Though consumed by mental conflict, Mrs Ferraby's stagnation and inhibition, her lack of dynamic movement epitomised by her husband, are presented as an unnecessary yet unavoidable 'sacrifice' on her part. The Bright Young Things of the 20s aren't really so free after all, White seems to suggest. Her achievement in 'Strangers' lies in presenting a portrait of a young woman and of the oppressive pressures she has to grapple with, having not yet been able to overcome them.

The war plays a crucial role here, and White in her short stories offers, as Jane Marcus argues, 'a brilliant fictional examination of the ways women were not empowered by the war'.⁹² The war in 'Strangers' (not discussed by Marcus) reminds Mrs Ferraby of her brother and the passive, sacrificial role she was forced to adopt on his death, a role that she finds herself pressured to perform for her husband twelve years later. The war seems to have structured her responses: grief, pain, and memories weighed heavily on her and put pressure on her to conform, to construct her own life around men's events and actions. White presents a different side to the impact of war on (middle-class) women. Though the war meant that

⁹¹ Jane Dunn, *Antonia White: A Life* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998), pp. 100-101. It is curious that Dunn has very little to say about a story which is as central to White's own concerns in the late 20s as 'Strangers' clearly is, merely commenting that it is a 'story of mistaken identity and the impossibility of really knowing another person' (p. 106). It may be that 'Strangers' has many elements (like a brother, for example) which Dunn would find difficult to explain in the purely, and one-sidedly, autobiographical readings of White's fiction that she employs.

women could do the same jobs as men, it was an ambiguous and contradictory process. It also signalled the end of the struggle for equality and the suffrage, becoming mostly (but not wholly – as the case of Sylvia Pankhurst, who refused to stop the suffrage campaign and support the war, shows) subsumed by the call of patriotism and national unity: ‘White’s fiction reinforces the urge to study women writers in relation to their own history, a narrative in which what are called the prewar years are in fact the high point of fifty years of struggle for equality. The war crushed this powerful movement, and their writing often articulates ambivalence about the reproductive or nurturing roles demanded of women’. Women of the late twenties like Antonia White, Rebecca West, and Faith Compton Mackenzie together articulate the dual process of gender equality and gender domination, freedom and constraint, travel and confinement. Their work registers both their newly won, newly experienced freedoms as well as their still dominant, day-to-day oppressions.

⁹² Jane Marcus, ‘Antonia White (1899-1980)’, in Bonnie Kime Scott, ed., *The Gender of Modernism*, pp. 597-603 (p. 601). Next quotation is from page 602.

3.6 Conclusion: Isolation or Change?

The *NS* in the late 20s had diverse fictive concerns, ranging from class conflict to gender oppression, from country isolation to travel in the Riviera. What is indeed striking (and unprecedented in the 20s) is the journal's impressive interest in a new generation of writers, like Fox, Bates, and White, which was grappling with the legacy of the War. Their response is one of rebellion and constraint, expressing both the will to change and the burden of existing conditions. Bates's characters are alone and feel dejected; Fox's are solitary and controlled by machines, yearning for peace and beauty (a flight which in the case of Mackenzie's agonised characters leads to Italy, and Nirvana); women writers also represented the possibilities of freedom and the stranglehold of domination. Together *NS* writers articulate both a potential for change and an oppressive frustration, a deeply ambivalent structure of feeling of never being able to break free yet never giving up trying. Which is exactly in contradiction with the ruling class's failure, yet perpetual attempts, to return to pre-war normalcy and tranquillity, a process determining the dominant ideology of the 20s.⁹³

In opposition to a return to the immediate Edwardian past, much favoured by the political elite in Britain, there was an invocation of a more distant one of the Middle Ages, invented, organic, and pre-industrial. There was also a portrayal of a tortured present of restless yet constricted social change. The failure of the General Strike thus signifies the frustration of hopes for a better, fairer, and more equal society that were expressed in the immediate aftermath of the War. Yet, an end is also a beginning. As the intensive political radicalisation of British writers in the 30s testifies, the Strike also marks the beginning of interwar bourgeois intellectual solidarity with the working class, a process epitomised by the

career of the *NS*'s Kingsley Martin. The political failure of the Strike (and, indeed, the active victimisation of workers in its aftermath) ushers in a period characterised by the increasing presence of the proletariat in the sphere of culture. Political loss contributes, as it were, to cultural gain, and going over to the side of the workers becomes the most urgent issue of the decade, a defining 'period problematic'.⁹⁴

⁹³ Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, pp. 194-9.

⁹⁴ Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, p. 9. Also relevant is 'Going Over', pp. 211-40.

Chapter 4

Colonial Fiction 1926-1930

4.1 Introduction

In 1927 the *NS* began publishing short stories on Egypt by E. R. Morrough, a British civil servant in the Egyptian government. Between 1927 and 1930, the journal published 13 pieces by him, including ten short stories dealing exclusively with Egypt. Put together, these contributions constitute the *NS*'s most sustained attempt to represent a non-European people in fiction in the interwar period.¹

Egypt is not the only foreign place of literary value to the *NS* in the late 20s, though. In this period, fiction on the colonies rises to become the most dominant site of literary representation in the journal as whole. Contributions from South Africa, by William Plomer, Roy Campbell, and Winifred Holtby, and from the East, by the Sufi Ikbal Ali Shah are also published; strangely, though, no fiction on India or by Indians was published. The aim of this chapter is thus to examine the rise of the 'subject races', to use Lord Cromer's derogatory term, in the fiction of the *NS*, beginning with the work of Morrough and concluding with Holtby's South African travel stories.² What this phase in the history of the journal testifies to is the rapidly expanding scope of literature in English and the growing metropolitan cultural engagement with issues of empire and colonialism.

¹ If this category is expanded to include all non-British contributions, then the Egyptian contingent is only surpassed by the journal's impressive record on Russian literature, especially by the end of the 30s, if not in the period as a whole.

² Lord Cromer (or Evelyn Baring) was governor-general of Egypt from its occupation in 1882 to 1907, when he retired. For his use of 'subject races' see Edward Said's discussion of Lord Balfour and Lord

4.2.1 E. R. Morrough on Independent Egypt

The sudden emergence of Egypt in *NS* literature comes at a time when British political dominance and military involvement in Egypt (dating back to 1882) were being sharply reduced in accordance with the 1922 declaration of independence, although 'Egyptian sovereignty was still severely limited'.³ Egypt was semi-independent and the British High Commission continued to intervene actively in local Egyptian politics in order to safeguard British interests. In 1924, for example, it forced the resignation of Sa'ad Zaghlul (the first Egyptian Prime Minister and the most popular politician in Egypt then) over the assassination of the governor-general of Sudan.⁴ Continual British intervention undermined Egyptian aspirations for total independence and perpetuated an atmosphere of political instability. The short stories of E. R. Morrough thus appear in the *NS* when Egypt itself was undergoing its fettered transition from occupation to self-government; a period characterised by continued struggle between residual British colonialism and Egyptian nationalism.

Morrough comments on this transitional period in Egyptian political and social life in his only political essay published (unsigned) in the *NS*. In 'Independent Egypt' he provides a summary of the state of political affairs in Egypt on the death of the Nationalist leader Sa'ad Zaghlul in 1927, and, following the retreat of British imperial governance, outlines his views on Egyptian self-administration. Overall, his assessment of post-independence Egypt is fairly bleak. Politically, he argues, the 'internal political

Cromer's views on modern Egypt in his *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978; repr. London: Penguin, 1995), pp. 35-7.

³ Peter Mansfield, *The British in Egypt* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p. 245.

⁴ See *Ibid.*, pp. 280-81.

situation is obscure', the only consensus being that nobody wants the British back; administratively, Egypt would have been far better off under the British.⁵

Morrough was particularly keen on dealing with the administrative side of things, which is his main concern in the essay. He states that the gradual withdrawal of the British administration of Egyptian affairs is nearly complete 'and except for the indirect and incalculable influences exerted through the offices of the Judicial Adviser and the Financial Adviser, British interference in the work of the various government departments is now almost non-existent' (p. 135). The dramatic decline of foreign, especially British, presence and influence has worked against the development of Egypt on Western lines, a policy which Egypt has already committed to. The current Western-trained Egyptian officials are inadequate and lack the 'ability to work in a disinterested public or scientific spirit', a state only really achieved in Egypt, according to Morrough, under Cromer's 'self-effacing public service' (p. 135). 'There is', for him, 'no room to doubt that the conduct of Government business in general is slower and more inefficient than it was' – especially with the growing mismanagement of the country's water resources and irrigation schemes and the decline in its cotton production (p. 135).

As his conclusion re-affirms, Morrough clearly thinks that Egypt still needs the organisational skills and services of British imperialism, and that Egypt has greatly suffered since its withdrawal. He even contemplates the possibility of reversing the political processes that led to the declaration of 1922 (especially the decisions of the 1920 Milner Commission which recommended independence). Desiring a return to full British administration was also a way of trying to avoid the erosion of his own position as a

⁵ E. R. Morrough, 'Independent Egypt', *NS*, 12 November 1927, pp. 134-6 (p. 134). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

judicial official based in the still foreign-run Mixed Tribunal Courts. All things considered, though, what is striking about Morrough's imperial logic and rhetoric is the manner in which he de-politicises the notion of 'administration' itself by relegating politics and Egyptian national aspirations to the margins. 'Administration' thus becomes a neutral construct, and since the British are clearly so much better at it than the Egyptians they should be in charge of it in Egypt. For Morrough, at the heart of the imperial venture lies the simple fact of superior management skills, the possession of which by the British provides them with the moral right of practice. Superior and efficient administration is the be-all and end-all of empire, according to Morrough, not economic exploitation nor capitalist competition for markets and resources. For an imperial functionary like him, administration becomes a supreme value in itself, and, in an odd ideological twist, the reason behind and justification for empire.

How does this complicated set of assumptions and political attitudes on Egypt get translated in the realm of fiction, in Morrough's own *NS* short stories? What does he see of Egypt when he comes to write about it in his fiction? How does he represent Egyptians and how does the imperial encounter fare under his fictive gaze? 'The Blocked Jet', a *NS* short story, is a good place to start discussing these points since the narrative focuses on an encounter between an English couple and some Egyptian villagers in the rural outskirts of Cairo.

4.2.2 E. R. Morrough's Egyptian Fiction

The villages were not a pretty sight [...] And the inhabitants within these walls were equally depressing to a civilised mind: mangy dogs which snapped at the car, chickens nearly naked with feather-eating, small filthy children with rosettes of flies round their eyes and nostrils, who shouted baksheesh. Also as they passed through these human ant-heaps they were assailed by a terrible latrine-smell from the over-populated ground never washed by rain from one year's end to the next.⁶

Mr Smith and his 'delicately nurtured' wife take a motor tour up the Nile Valley and pass through some villages on their way. Their impression of rural Egyptians is registered above: they are filthy, live in smelly settlements, and have human ant-heaps for homes. The main events of the story occur when Mr Smith, while driving through a narrow village road, runs over and kills a little boy 'who darted out from a doorway within a few feet of them' (p. 406). As the villagers gather round the car, the pace of the story quickens. Suddenly, the boy's mother 'came out of one of the holes in the wall and began to cry in a strained nerve-racking voice' (p. 406). A 'big fellah' steps out of the crowd and demands that the boy's mother be paid compensation for her loss. Mr Smith, becoming increasingly confused, could only think of his insurance company's guidelines of conduct: ' "It was not my fault," answered Mr. Smith. Before his eyes he could see very clearly the injunction on his insurance policy: "Admit no liability." "Admit no liability." He had no intention of doing so. The child had committed suicide' (p. 406). At that moment his wife gave a loud shout after having been approached by a 'creature [...] in the last stages of syphilis' demanding *baksheesh*. Mr Smith panics, sits in his car and while trying to escape bumps two villagers before his engine comes to a sudden halt: 'Immediately the entire car was covered with a mass of assailants like an injured wasp

attacked by ants' (p. 406). Mr Smith is found battered to death in a sugar-cane field two days later; his wife is presumably consumed by the fires that destroyed the car and half of the village later that day.

This narrative is framed by two conversations in a Club in Cairo – possibly the Turf Club (founded by Cromer) or the recently established Royal Automobile Club of Egypt – on the importance of keeping your car regularly serviced and your carburettor clean. Mr Smith had clearly neglected to do so or he would certainly have been able to get away. For the Club members, the only lesson to be learnt from this incident is to keep your motor well serviced, especially when going out of Cairo: it was Mr Smith's duty as a colonialist to be ready and prepared for the worst, and having shirked his responsibility his downfall was inevitable. No blame is apportioned to the Egyptian villagers since, presumably, they are always expected to behave that way. Clearly, the death of an Egyptian boy is not really the issue here, nor is the fact that Mr Smith got himself stuck in an Egyptian village. The real issue is that he stayed stuck there. That is the tragedy. In the end, it was a technical problem that resulted in Mr and Mrs Smith's deaths and the burning of half the village, not the fact that they accidentally ran over a little boy while cruising leisurely in the narrow alley-ways of a remote Egyptian village. Would it still have been a tragedy had Mr Smith been able to get away? The story seems to suggest that it wouldn't.

The disastrous outcome of the meeting between occupier and occupied is thus caused by a carelessness on the part of the former. The pressure to read the story as an account of the tragic and destructive nature of the imperial encounter itself is contained

⁶ E. R. Morrough, 'The Blocked Jet', *NS*, 7 January 1928, pp. 405-407 (p. 406). Further references are given after quotations in the text. A similar attitude can also be found in Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*

(and literally framed) within the parameters of a technicality, i.e. cleaning a carburettor. While voicing the actual violence of the encounter, the narrative works against reading such violence as an intrinsic and inextricable part of imperial reality itself. Accidents happen, and people do make blunders, sometimes with tragic consequences. Such a reading of the events in the village clearly dilutes and undermines the fact and function of the colonial presence in Egypt and misconstrues the whole nature of the colonial relationship.

The encounter described in 'The Blocked Jet' is a negative one, where the opposition between natives and colonialists is very marked: the ant-like Egyptians are uncivilised and criminal, while the wasp-like British are misunderstood. This way of looking at Egyptians and of constructing their difference from the British is characteristic of Morrough's other *NS* fiction. 'Garden Street' is a case in point.

'Garden Street' significantly moves from a description of the splendiferous Orientalist interior of a government office department, where 'the canvas ceilings are adorned with multitudes of porcine Venuses adrift on gilt raptures',⁷ to the street life outside. What is outside the office-building always exerts great pressure on E. R. Morrough. To a certain degree the outside even comes to haunt him both as an Englishman and writer in Egypt, as this story's ending demonstrates. 'Garden Street' is completely dominated by the activity of gazing down at the street below, and Morrough is endlessly looking at the street, observing it, noting its figures and details, and registering his impressions. He predominantly experiences Garden Street from the inside of his office, and from there he relays it to the reader. The street, it appears, 'stinks of

(London: Victor Gollancz, 1939), p. 105.

sluttishness and disrepair and disrepute', and Morrough is 'steeped in noise [...] immersed in smells and dust' (p. 564). It is best known for housing the 'chief prostitutes quarter' of Cairo and contains numerous foreign-owned hotels and bars that cater for many British soldiers who are attracted to its vibrant nightlife. The street is also well known for its political activity, and where sex is to be had at night nationalist slogans are chanted in the morning when the usual roar of the traffic is replaced by '“Yehi' el Watan,” [Long Live the Homeland, in Arabic] “Istiklal et Tam” [Complete Independence, in Arabic]'. 'Often there followed the unpleasant sounds of civil disturbance, the smashing of glass, the scatter and scurry of feet' (p. 565), sounds which will be heard again in the capital, Morrough states gloomily.

From nationalist demonstrations in the morning to prostitution at night, from being a site where national politics are enacted to one where the sexual politics of occupation are played out, Garden Street mediates many types of encounters and relationships between Egyptians and British. The most constitutive encounter of all for Morrough in this piece is the one between him as spectator and the city street itself as observed object.

'Garden Street' is thus very much a city work, a work that is materially of the city, a compendium of city scenes, events, and figures: City Life Egyptian-style and as seen by a British observer. Morrough specifically mentions and describes the following street figures: the tarbush seller; the blind whip-maker; 'a collection of recumbent forms, of all ages and mostly shrunk with under-feeding and disease' (p. 565); some 'old negresses' who tell people's fortune; the Armenian three-card-trick man (whose workings

⁷ E. R. Morrough, 'Garden Street', *NS*, 9 February 1929, pp. 564-5 (p. 564). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

are plain for Morrough to see from his 'upper window'). The watcher is, however, most struck by the beggars. They impinge themselves upon his thought and imagination, and their presence in the street affects him considerably. 'Three in particular burn themselves upon my notice', he says, and lists the 'boy with the stick legs who spends his life crawling up and down the asphalt pavements'; the 'blind boy who every day, punctually at the hour of the 'asr [afternoon, in Arabic], takes his seat and uplifts his voice in nasal appeal'; and the third one who 'is no longer a man [...] He makes no sound and only a single movement. With elbow on the ground he seesaws his left hand endlessly up and down. Nothing is left of his fingers. Over his head they have, mercifully, pulled a sack' (p. 565). Morrough always tries to avoid the third beggar's side of the railings. This one weighs very heavily on his mind, and this is why he believes he wrote the story: 'I may be able to get him out of my mind if I speak of him. I believe that is why I have written this at all' (p. 565). He concludes the essay with a strikingly revealing confession: 'There are times, after I have walked down Garden Street, when I feel I can never be clean again' (p. 565).

Morrough's motivation and primary intention behind writing this piece become clear at the end. He wants to get the beggar out of his mind, to write him out, as it were. He uses writing as a way of managing and containing the impact of the colonial spectacle. He believes that the observed or gazed at colonial material contains a negative sort of potency to be exorcised by the act of writing. The story thus moves from Morrough as detached spectator bemused by Egyptian street life to him as haunted writer. The act of gazing out at the Other, the native, the occupied, turns sour and comes back to haunt him and unsettle his own position as occupier, civilising agent, and colonial

spectator. Significantly, the Orientalist tradition of looking at Egypt, epitomised by E. W. Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (mentioned by Morrough at the beginning of the piece), of possessing and controlling Egypt through obsessively accumulating and registering its every observable detail seems to have become problematical for him, writing a hundred years after Lane. Unlike Lane, Morrough finds it difficult to control and regulate the spectacle of Egypt. He fails to maintain Lane's position of detached Orientalist spectator, leisurely 'taking a walk through Egyptian life', scholarly registering and scientifically describing its every detail'.⁸

Edward Said in his discussion of Lane in *Orientalism* emphasises the 'sheer, overpowering, monumental description' of *Modern Egyptians* and argues that: 'Lane's objective is to make Egypt and the Egyptians totally visible, to keep nothing hidden from his reader, to deliver the Egyptians without depth, in swollen detail'.⁹ In a typically Orientalist dynamic, Lane seeks to possess Egypt by knowing it in obsessive detail; Morrough, however, becomes possessed by it but fails to adequately control it. He lacks Lane's scholarly equanimity and detached confidence as well as what Said calls Lane's 'cold distance from Egyptian life and Egyptian productivity'. Morrough is far more engaged with and troubled by what he sees in Egypt, as 'Garden Street' clearly demonstrates.

In a modernist, Conradian twist, then, Morrough the clean colonial administrator armed with the supremacist ideology of imperial governance feels unclean on encountering the native. Unlike the morally uplifting (and for Conrad redeeming) idea of

⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 163. Lane's biographer, Leila Ahmed, describes him as 'Unquestionably one of the greatest orientalist Britain has ever produced' (*Edward W. Lane: A Study of His Life and Works and of British Ideas of the Middle East in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Longman, 1978), p. vi.

⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 162. Next quotations is also from p. 162.

imperialism, of the 'white man's burden', the actual colonial meeting is very unsettling, even corrupting. The twentieth-century tension that exists between imperialism as a set of ideas and discourses and the actual material colonial encounter itself, between, in a sense, idea and practice, has been famously articulated by Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*: 'The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to'.¹⁰ This tension or lack of correspondence between the idea of imperialism (the new religion of modern man, according to Conrad) and the practice of colonisation is clearly present in Morrough's work. In his case it is also the tension between Orientalism as a powerful discourse and set of ideas about the Orient, 'as the system of European or Western knowledge about the Orient',¹¹ and his actual encounter with Egyptian life. In a sense Orientalism, both as a

¹⁰ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: J. M. Dent, 1902; repr. London: Penguin, 1983), p. 31-32.

¹¹ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 197. Said's *Orientalism* is an important though very problematic work. Aijaz Ahmad in his essay 'Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Metropolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said' (in his *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 159-219) argues that the text is torn between the conflicting ideologies and methodologies of Auerbachian humanism and Foucauldian anti-humanism. In order to simultaneously maintain the Auerbachian and Foucauldian stances Said thus 'offers mutually incompatible definitions of "Orientalism"' (p. 166). As a result, *Orientalism* is inconsistent and theoretically confused. Ahmad also raises the issue of Said's anti-communism, his misrepresentation of Marx as an Orientalist, and his rhetorical dismissal of Marx's views on colonialism (see also 'Marx on India: A Clarification', pp. 221-42). For another important theoretical critique of Said's *Orientalism*, also detailing Said's conflictual theoretical positions and problems of methodology see Robert Young's 'Disorienting Orientalism' in his *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 119-40.

V. G. Kiernan, in an early review of *Orientalism* (*Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 9 (1979), 345-51), also makes the point that Said's is a historically indiscriminating and essentialising narrative that suffers from serious omissions of fact. Especially surprising is Said's complete disregard for the huge and fundamental presence of the Ottoman Empire that dominated the Near East for 500 years – throughout most of the period covered by *Orientalism*. For a historical study of the relationship between Europe and the rest of the world see Kiernan's pioneering *The Lords of Humankind: European Attitudes towards the Outside World in the Imperial Age* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969).

position within and attitude towards the East, and as an ideological justification for colonial rule, is no longer powerful and potent enough to make Morrough feel 'clean' and confident in his position as an agent of western civilisation. The ideological use-value of such Orientalist texts as Lane's *Modern Egyptians* seems to have been lost or severely reduced for somebody like Morrough who feels he 'can never be clean again'. Yet, he refuses to clearly state that the idea of imperialism has fractured under the weight of the colonial encounter. For him, the inadequacy of imperialist and Orientalist discourses is manifested and expressed negatively, in his colonial worries and fears, in his own feelings of becoming as unclean as he thinks the natives are. As Benita Parry has argued, narrations of empire are at this time 'disrupted by the ambiguities, doubts, anxieties and alienations of a stylistic modernism'.¹²

Very much like Lane, Morrough, although in Egypt as a colonial official and not an Orientalist scholar, actively ventures out into Egyptian life, and his short stories register his many encounters and impressions. He sees less of the sites, monuments and mummies of ancient Egypt and more of the modern Egyptians themselves. Furthermore, the doings and goings of the Anglo-Egyptian community are of no real interest to him¹³ and his fictive gaze remains predominantly engaged with scenes from the lives of 'ordinary' Egyptians: Cairene street figures and servants, Nubian doormen, etc. The only short story that features treasures, antiques, and adventures tells of the rivalry of two European archaeologists who, in their pursuit of the treasures of the ancient world, marry

For the purposes of this essay I will take Orientalism to refer to a modern (i.e. late eighteenth century) discipline and form of western knowledge about the Orient that came about as a result of the practice of imperialism and the processes of capitalist expansion and accumulation.

¹² Benita Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', *Oxford Literary Review* 9 (1987), 27-58 (p. 55).

into a Bedouin tribe for protection.¹⁴ Clearly, what concerns Morrough in his fiction is social life and social detail. Yet, as I will argue below, it is a particular kind of society he sees and a particular kind of Egypt he constructs. In Morrough's Egypt, the natives are violent, uncivilised, and lazy; their only redeeming feature being their humble communion with God as individuals during prayer – Islam being this socially ubiquitous, mysterious religion that an 'infidel' (to borrow Morrough's description of himself) would find impenetrable.¹⁵

In 'The Convicts', for example, he describes a group of convicts waiting to be transported to their prison up the Nile as 'a pitiful collection of commonplace faces [...]. Their commonest characteristic is just weakness, obscured or accentuated according to individual features, by their grisly black unshavenness'.¹⁶ One particular convict looks at the narrator 'with the quick expressionless gaze of an ape': 'He has a queer long face like a mandrill's, only, of course, without a mandrill's magnificence of colouring. He blinks his eyes incessantly, with an animal blink' (p. 812). Morrough's crowd is predominantly made up of fellaheen (farmers), apathetic, resigned and unresisting. Their crimes, it seems, are of the kind that 'any man' would commit:

Do not think that they are crushed by the shamefulness of their position. There is no shame in being sent to prison. Any man being hungry might steal; any man suffering under the extortions of the village omda [chief] might concert with other disconcerted ones and lay the petty tyrant out; any man exasperated in a neighbourly way beyond endurance might poison his enemy or his enemy's cow;

¹³ There is only one piece that deals exclusively with the affairs of the Anglo-Egyptians: 'Psyche', *NS*, 23 June 1928, pp. 355-7. It tells the story of a woman who comes all the way from England in search of her shell-shocked lover.

¹⁴ E. R. Morrough, 'The Barber-Surgeon's Tale', *NS*, 10 March 1928, pp. 692-3.

¹⁵ See E. R. Morrough, 'Prayer', *NS*, 27 August 1927, pp. 619-20.

¹⁶ E. R. Morrough, 'The Convicts', *NS*, 8 October 1927, pp. 812-3 (p. 812). Further references are given after quotations in the text. 'Weak' seems to have been quite a favourite British way of describing natives, their looks and behaviour. It is used to describe Indians in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (e.g. p. 220) – see below for discussion of the novel.

any man might smuggle hashish and be the means of dowering his fellow-believers with gorgeous dreams. (p. 812)

Hunger, tyrants, poison, and hashish are common enough things in the lives of the fellaheen. 'Any man's' crimes are the crimes of 'commonplace people', an accepted and natural part of social life in the Egyptian countryside.

In another piece entitled 'Egyptian Interlude', Morrough tells the story of four Nubians (apparently, a 'remarkably coarse', 'not very moral' and generally inactive people) who travel down from Cairo to their village in Aswan and drown their young sister over rumours that she is no longer a virgin.¹⁷ This act of violence is committed with the full knowledge and support of the other villagers; everyone approved and anyone would have done the same: 'Everyone in the village knew what had happened to Latifa [the kind or nice one, in Arabic]. Everyone approved. No right-thinking person would omit to wipe out a family disgrace as soon as possible' (p. 446). Again, the crime is not individual; it is collective, a commonsensical act accepted as social norm. In Egypt, Morrough is saying, murder is the natural and expected way of dealing with the likes of Latifa. As the title of the piece suggests, murder is an Egyptian interlude, a break from the normality of everyday life that defines the nature of that normality.

This is the Egypt that he wanted to see, indeed could only have seen without having had to challenge his political views on empire and colonial administration. In a striking essay on Africa published in the *NS*, he even goes as far as saying that Africa has no visible civilisation and is therefore (in the title of the piece) 'Without a History'. The

¹⁷ E. R. Morrough, 'Egyptian Interlude', *NS*, 16 July 1927, pp. 443-5 (p. 444). Further references are after quotations in the text.

African landscape, from Morrough's perspective, lacks the 'records of the feet of men'.¹⁸ He sees 'not a hint that men lived or thought or built or planned here'; the only thing that the African has done is wage war: 'The African has merely waged incessant, and I am sure in the main unintelligent, war against famine and wild beasts and the next tribe, supplied the slave-markets of the world, and, from the beginning of time until wheels began to help him as it were yesterday, carried on his head the trade of the continent' (p. 500). African labour is less durable than the work of ants, and the African has clearly 'brought to it [the land] and left in it of himself no more than the ants' (p. 500). Having no tradition to learn from, the only hope Africa has for developing a semblance of a civilisation comes from the industrialised West: 'The African takes as little thought for the morrow as he does of the past; and so far he has achieved nothing more than a precarious camp in the jungle. But he is beginning to think about using corrugated iron' (p. 500).

A sense of a land empty, without visible or durable signs of human civilisation or ownership is what an occupier and imperialist desires to see in an age defined and marked by 'the scramble for Africa', a term implying the hurried flight to possess a patch that is 'without a history' and, by inference, belongs to the one who manages to get there first. Morrough's 'ant' stands as a metaphor for the natives and for their existence; like the ant, the African 'tills endlessly [...] builds endlessly', leaving behind nothing permanent or enduring. Interestingly, this is not the first time one comes across this metaphor in his work. He also uses 'ants' to describe Egyptian behaviour; like ants on a wasp was the way he described the villagers' attack on the English traveller in 'The

¹⁸ E. R. Morrough, 'Without a History', *NS*, 25 January 1930, pp. 499-500 (p. 500). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

Blocked Jet' discussed earlier: 'covered with a mass of assailants like an injured wasp attacked by ants' (p. 406). Morrough clearly finds 'ants' a useful descriptive tool, serving as an analogous substitute for human beings on the African continent. Ants are small, insignificant, easily crushed, but they can also constitute a danger when in sufficiently big numbers, *en mass*, as it were. 'Ants' can also serve as a metaphor for multitudinousness, for crowds and masses: there are ever so many ants, streams and streams of them dangerously united in a common task and the collective struggle to survive. As a metaphor 'ants' is clearly very ambiguous, affirming weakness and insignificance as well as industry and strength in numbers. Thus, it simultaneously contains two contradictory meanings and processes, and therein lies its fundamental significance in Morrough's work. 'Ants' embodies both his waspish western imperial confidence and supremacy as well as his colonial fears and worries of the many, the swarming masses who demonstrate and shout nationalist slogans and whose ant-like 'scatter and scurry of feet' he could hear from his window in 'Garden Street'. Embedded in the metaphor of the natives as ants is the dual and intertwined historic dynamic of British occupation and Egyptian independence, of dominance and resistance, empire and liberation.

As is clear from Morrough's *NS* short stories, being aligned with the forces of empire had a decisive impact on his fiction and aesthetic representation of Egypt. His aesthetics are deeply implicated in the world of imperial politics and can best be described as *the aesthetics of imperial control*, containing Egyptian social life within the ideological parameters of colonial rule. He was clearly unable to break away from the dominant hold of imperialism and represent Egypt or Africa without the mediation of

imperial ideology. Other writers did, and the case of James Leslie Mitchell, to which I would like to turn, serves as a very illuminating comparison with Morrough's own hostility towards Egypt.

4.3 Leslie Mitchell's Egyptian Revolutionary

Mitchell, otherwise known as Lewis Grassie Gibbon, author of the Scottish trilogy *A Scots Quair* (1932-34), was in Egypt at roughly the same time as Morrough. After a spell of unemployment, he decided reluctantly to join the British Army and was stationed in Egypt during the revolutionary period of 1919 to 1922 when Egypt was in active, mass revolt against British occupation. His time there proved to be crucial for his career as a writer and his first short stories ever to be published were about Egypt. In fact, when he was desperately trying to publish his first novel *Stained Radiancy* (finally published in 1930), Leonard Huxley (on the advice of H. G. Wells) agreed to publish two short stories of his on Egypt in the monthly *Cornhill Magazine*. This sparked off what became quite a long affair between Mitchell and the *Cornhill* and, in all, he published more than twenty short stories in the magazine. Curiously, nearly half of the short stories were published at exactly the time Morrough was publishing his own pieces on Egypt in the *NS*.¹⁹ Mitchell also published (nearly every month from July 1929 to June 1930), what came to be known as the *Polychromata*, a story-cycle set in Cairo and narrated by a Russian ex-professor and ex-colonel. These twelve pieces were also collected in a book entitled *The Calends of Cairo* (1931) which was introduced by both Wells and Huxley. Morrough's own collected short stories, some of which appeared in the *NS*, in J. C. Squire's *London Mercury* and in *Nash's Magazine*, had been published a year before under the exotic and quite misleading title of *The Temple Servant and Other Stories* (1930).

¹⁹ It is very possible that Mitchell (living in London then) was encouraged to write fiction on Egypt when he came across Morrough's short stories which started to appear in the *NS* as early as July 1927, nearly one and a half years before the publication of Mitchell's first *Cornhill* piece. Mitchell's biographer, Ian S. Munro, in his *Leslie Mitchell: Lewis Grassie Gibbon* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), does not say *why* Mitchell started to write on Egypt when he did, approximately five years after coming back from the Middle East.

Both Morrough and Mitchell played a part in the colonial administration of Egypt, both were inspired to write fiction about the country, and both began to publish their fiction in the metropolis at roughly the same time. That is, however, as far as the objective comparison goes. While Morrough was in complete support of and sympathy with the imperial machine, Mitchell was radically against it. Being a convert to Marxism and radical politics early on, he was able to see the exploitation of empire and the increasingly organised resistance to it. His views on imperialism are clearly expressed in a striking short story entitled 'One Man and His Dream' (later changed to 'Revolt'), the second story to be published in the *Cornhill* (May 1929).²⁰ Here, 'The Nile flowed red like a river of blood' (p. 160), and everybody was waiting for the protagonist Rejeb ibn Saud to 'light the flames of vengeance and revolution across the European city from Bulaq to Heliopolis' (p. 161). On being told that 'those English' he opposes are 'ever strong, ever wary' he shouts back in anger and defiance: 'And what of the folk – our brothers, our sisters – who die out there in their hovels and hunger? Thousands every year [...] We miserable "natives" – unclean things with unclean souls – to-night we shall light such a candle in Egypt as no man –' (p. 161-2). Ibn Saud is clearly ready to revolt and strike against the enemy in the name of freedom. As one Englishman says in the story, rebellion is a natural response to empire: 'He had never encountered a white man, settled amongst brown, who was not living on the edge of a volcano' (p. 162). In the end, however, the volcano does not erupt and Ibn Saud is killed as a traitor. This sudden twist

²⁰ Had it not been for the sustained efforts of H. Gustav Klaus, who published 'One Man and His Dream' in his anthology *Tramps, Workmates and Revolutionaries: Working-Class Stories of the 1920s* (London; Journeyman, 1993), pp. 160-70, only a handful of experts on Scottish Literature would have known about Mitchell's early, English short stories. As Klaus argues in his introduction to this unique collection of working-class fiction, Mitchell's piece draws attention to 'the contemporaneous struggles going on elsewhere in the world against British imperialism' (p. 9). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

in the story is due to a change of heart that he undergoes after rescuing an English girl from being stoned by a couple of youths on his way to addressing the 'insurrectionists'. A sudden vision of the violence that will erupt on his command creeps up on him: 'Fire in the Maghrabi, massacre and loot; the screamings of rape, crackle of rifle fire, knives in brown hands...' (p. 164). Ibn Saud imagines that the whole history of civilisation had been a record of children crying in the dark and decides that he will not participate in sentencing yet another generation to racial violence and hatred:

He had sought to poison the unguessable future that was not his: he sought to murder it now in death for the hearts and hands that might save the world, might win a wide path through all the tangles of breed and creed and race, reach even to that dream that might yet be no dream – the Brotherhood of Man. (p. 168)

Ibn Saud's vague idealism wins over in the end and he shies away from violence. He fears violence because of the negative mark it leaves on future generations, and he abandons it in the name of racial equality and harmony.

It is clear that Mitchell had strong support for the anti-imperial struggle, and he draws a sympathetic picture of a revolutionary's doubts and hesitations before the advent of bloodshed. His conclusion does not in any way undermine the extent of suffering and exploitation that Egyptians experience under colonial rule. It does, however, demonstrate his idealism and the reformistic tendencies of his early career. In what is probably the most informed critical book on Mitchell, William K. Malcolm argues that he moves away from this early 'pacifism and romantic idealism' (p. 59) of 'One Man and his Dream', a story which expresses his belief in the cosmopolitan ideal of 'universal harmony'.²¹ What Malcolm calls Mitchell's phase of 'political moderatism' clearly refers to Mitchell's early

²¹ *A Blasphemer & Reformer: A Study of James Leslie Mitchell* (Lewis Grassie Gibbon) (Aberdeen; Aberdeen University Press, 1984), p. 59, p. 49. Subsequent quotation is also from p. 49.

Cornhill phase, a time of poverty and despair when the strains and pressures of attempting to get published in metropolitan London were great. His belief in the transformative power of violence would later be clearly asserted.

Mitchell critiques the imperial venture and manages to imagine a future when harmony among races would prevail. Morrough, by contrast, keeps to the road of imperial expansion, still seeking to colonise and consume those parts of the world that remain 'without a history'. That is why Morrough fears Egyptian violence and finds it deeply disturbing: it seeks to undermine his position as an agent of a superior civilisation. Violence questions Morrough's superiority and rule, and he has no sympathy or time for the Egyptian will to freedom, recognised (albeit awkwardly) by the liberal bourgeois writer E. M. Forster in a report on Egypt he was commissioned to write by the Labour Party (at the instigation of Leonard Woolf) after the 1919 revolt when Forster concluded: 'That people that risked so much for their Liberty can never be called inferior again. Whether their patriotism has a constructive side we cannot tell until we give it a chance: at present it necessarily takes the form of rioting'.²²

While Morrough was continuing his support for colonialism, other writers were responding to the will to freedom in the colonies and questioning the dominant ideology of imperialism and its representation of the natives. Their efforts and ideas, even though limited at times, signify the emergence of a new way of looking at empire and colonialism which is greatly at odds with the one advocated by Morrough.

²² E. M. Forster, *The Government of Egypt: Recommendations by a Committee of the International Section of the Labour Research Department* (London: Labour Research Department, 1921), p. 9.

4.4 E. M. Forster's Liberal Dissent

Forster's report 'Egypt' (1921) is significant because it signals not only the labour movement's growing interest in imperial and international relations (*The Labour International Handbook*, edited by R. Palme Dutt, was published in 1921) but also the beginning of the intelligentsia's post-war engagement with political events and issues related to empire, especially in the East and the African continent. For an individualist bourgeois intellectual like Forster to become deeply involved in issues of imperialism and colonial administration clearly points to the widening scope of metropolitan culture. From India (1912-13) to wartime Egypt (1915-1918) to India (1921) and back to England again, and from 'Egypt' (1921) to *Alexandria: A History and a Guide* (1922) to *Pharos and Pharillon* (1923) to *A Passage to India* (1924), the span of Forster's actual and intellectual travel in this period is clearly registered.²³ Although the subject matter varies significantly from India to Egypt, his liberal-humanist response to empire does not, and there is much in common between such very different works as 'Egypt' and *A Passage to India*. There is the same emphasis on personal relationships and on the humanity and individuality of the occupied and colonised, and the same shying away from radical collective politics. Like *A Passage to India*, 'Egypt' also came out of a personal relationship with a local, had even been written, Forster said, 'for the sake of Mohammed

²³ What can be described as the 'Egyptian phase' in English cultural history remains neglected. Forster spent much of the Great War there. T. M. Muggeride taught English Literature at the Egyptian University in Cairo (1927-1930) under Bonamy Dobrée, who held the post of Professor of English from 1926 to 1930. Clennell Wilkinson, *NS* literary editor for a couple of months in the 30s, worked at the Ministry of Information in 1907 and served as editor of *Egyptian Gazette* in Alexandria in 1908. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt was there, and wrote *The Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt*. A more radical visitor was Irish-Marxist Fred Ryan, who co-edited with William Maloney, Mustafa Kamil's *Egyptian Standard* until 1909. Terry Eagleton has recently discovered Ryan (See his 'The Ryan Line', in *Crazy John and the Bishop: and Other Essays on Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998), pp. 249-72, especially 254 and pp. 267-71).

[his Egyptian lover] and his sufferings'.²⁴ Colonial administrators and agents of empire are (controversially) damned in both texts, but in 'Egypt' he could not bring himself to respond positively to Egyptian popular demand and recommend complete independence. Out of the four possible solutions offered at the end of the report, his personal favourite (privately disclosed in a letter) was having Egypt mandated to Britain under the guarantee of the League of Nations, described by Forster as 'the best severely practical solution'.²⁵

Forster's great human sympathy for the downtrodden, the occupied and the colonised is also expressed in *A Passage to India*; so is his dissident, yet ultimately inadequate, political response to empire.²⁶ The post-colonial theorist and critic Benita Parry makes the point that because *A Passage to India* 'is the product of an intelligence and sensibility nurtured within the cultural and intellectual context of liberal-humanism', it fails to go beyond the 'sanctity of individual relationships' and see the exploitation inherent in imperialism: 'just as liberalism was unable to produce a fundamental critique of western colonialism, so is a consciousness of imperialism's historical dimensions absent from *A Passage to India*'.²⁷ Parry also argues that, as with other British Indian texts, 'all traces of base interests – India as a source of materials, cheap labour, markets and investment opportunities, and India as a linchpin of Britain's wider imperial

²⁴ From a letter to F. Bargar quoted in Hilda D. Spear and Abdel-Moneim Aly 'Politics Disowned: Forster's *Egypt* and *The Labour International Handbook*', *Durham University Journal*, 53 (1992), 91-4, (p.94). Next quotation is from p. 93. Forster's first ever interview was given in Egypt to a Greek newspaper and was published for the first time in English only recently, edited and introduced by Spear and Aly, as *Forster in Egypt: A Graeco-Alexandrian Encounter* (London: Cecil Woolf, 1987).

²⁵ The system of Mandate was envisioned as a form of trusteeship for the natives, a liberal substitute for an overtly exploitative imperialism, and was strongly advocated by Leonard Woolf in both his *Empire and Commerce in Africa: A Study in Economic Imperialism* (1919) and his *Imperialism and Civilisation* (1928), where it is presented as the civilised alternative for 'a belligerent, crusading, exploiting, proselytising civilisation' (London: Hogarth Press), p. 9. For a critique of Woolf's ambivalent relationship to imperialism, see Gillian Workman, 'Leonard Woolf and Imperialism', *Ariel*, 6 (1975), 5-21.

²⁶ Also relevant here is Forster's *The Hill of Devi*.

ambitions – were erased’ from the novel.²⁸ Forster’s narrator even once remarks that:

‘One touch of regret – not the canny substitute but the true regret from the heart– would have made him [Ronny] a different man, and the British Empire a different institution’.²⁹

These are clear ideological limitations of the individualist liberal sort, where the actions and emotions of one individual are used to explain the functions of a geopolitical entity rooted in economic exploitation. But one also needs to recognise that in *A Passage to India* Forster breaks with the dominant mode of representing empire and the colonised so evident in the work of a colonialist like E. R. Morrough.³⁰

Forster’s act of breaking with the dominant ideology is a point that Raymond Williams has made about the Bloomsbury Group as a whole, a political and cultural act that comes to define Bloomsbury as a social formation. In ‘The Bloomsbury Fraction’, Williams argues for the importance of seeing Bloomsbury as a fraction of the existing upper class, being simultaneously ‘against its dominant values and ideas and still willingly, in all immediate ways, part of it’.³¹ Forster and his fellow Bloomsberries were bearers of an emerging set of social and political attitudes and values, a structure of feeling, which converges around the phrase ‘social conscience’. This, for Williams, is ‘the precise formulation of a particular social position, in which a fraction of an upper

²⁷ Benita Parry, ‘*A Passage to India*: Epitaph or Manifesto?’ in *E. M. Forster: A Human Exploration: Centenary Essays* ed. by G. K. Das and John Beer (New York: New York University Press, 1979), pp. 129-41 (p. 131, p. 130, p. 131).

²⁸ Benita Parry, ‘Materiality and Mystification in *A Passage to India*’, *Novel*, 31(1998), 174-94 (p. 180).

²⁹ E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (London: Edward Arnold, 1924; repr. Penguin, 1985), p. 70.

³⁰ As the anonymous (1981) entry on Forster in the *Dictionary of National Biography* states: ‘He distrusted size, pomp, the Establishment, empires, politics, the upper classes, planners, institutions. He put his trust in individuals, small groups and insignificant people, the life of the heart and mind, personal relations’. Forster was also homosexual, and what he himself wrote about Carpenter in his essay on him in *Two Cheers for Democracy* does indeed apply to Forster himself: ‘As he had looked outside his own class for companionship, so he was obliged to look outside his own race for wisdom’ (quoted in Parry, *Materiality and Mystification*, p. 182). William Plomer was in the same position.

³¹ Raymond Williams, ‘The Bloomsbury Fraction’, in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 148-69 (p. 156). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

class, breaking from its dominant majority, relates to a lower class *as a matter of conscience* [...] at once against the cruelty and stupidity of the system and towards its otherwise relatively helpless victims' (p. 155). Bloomsbury was thus moved to act upon the hegemonic values of its class, and it did so as a group of free individuals united in their civilising objective; for Williams, that is indeed why they 'must be seen, finally, as a (civilising) fraction of their class' (p. 169).

Seeing Forster as a person who, while coming out of his class, is moved by his 'social conscience' to go against its existing hegemony situates *A Passage to India* in its original and particular class context. It also enables a reading of it that accounts for both its anti-hegemonic stance as well as its limited bourgeois liberal perspective. Parry would certainly subscribe to such a reading, and she concludes her own essay, 'The Politics of Representation in *A Passage to India*', by affirming the uniqueness of the novel: 'this novel is a rare instance of a libertarian perspective on another subordinated culture produced from within an imperialist metropolis'.³² What such a perspective acknowledges is the actual fact of seeing, the fact of telling and representing India and, more importantly, Indians in metropolitan fiction. Herein lies the claim of the text to being an oppositional work. It is a novel that opens certain cultural avenues of representation and by the same act closes others down and acknowledges its limited representational power over the unknown territory and peoples of India, a place that would remain ultimately unknowable within the liberal-humanist tradition. Parry, in her latest essay on *A Passage to India*, goes even as far as saying that India in all its rocks, caves, fields, hills and inhospitable soil, in all its material presence, resists the invaders'

³² Benita Parry, 'The Politics of Representation in *A Passage to India*', in *E. M. Forster*, ed. by Jeremy Tambling (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), pp. 133-50 (p. 148).

feet, and argues that: 'The novel's dissident place within British writing about India does not reside in its meagre critique of a colonial situation, however, but in configuring India's natural terrain and cognitive traditions as inimical to the British presence'.³³ The novel should thus be understood by accounting for both its actual representations and (what Parry calls) its silences, what lies outside its representational scope and power.

³³ Parry, 'Materiality and Mystification', p. 180.

4.5 William Plomer's Radical Liberalism

Forster was not the only figure who benefited from Bloomsbury's dissenting views on empire. Leonard Woolf, having egged him on to produce *A Passage to India*, also promoted the work of William Plomer and published one of the most controversial, anti-imperial novels to come out of the interwar period: Plomer's *Turbott Wolfe* (1925). The then literary editor of the *NS* Desmond MacCarthy (Woolf's friend and fellow Bloomsberry) described it in his weekly editorial as 'a novel so good that it kept me from looking out of the window for nearly three hours'.³⁴ The story of *Turbott Wolfe* is remarkable by any standards. Written when the author was nineteen, it was sent to Woolf at the Hogarth Press who, on consulting Virginia Woolf, immediately decided to publish it. This brought Plomer fame, recognition, and the fury of white South Africans. By challenging their deeply entrenched views on the so called 'Native Question', Plomer caused, as one commentator has put it, an 'intellectual riot' in South Africa:

I remember the excitement and impassioned argument provoked at various times by *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *The Well of Loneliness*, the publication in France of Claudel's correspondence with Gide over Gide's homosexuality; later, over the American nymphet *Lolita*, and recently over *Fanny Hill*. But none equalled the pitch and hysteria of this African occasion. I imagine one may well have to reach back to some aspects of the Dreyfus affair and Emile Zola for parallels, since the appearance of *Turbott Wolfe* had a marked sociological and political as well as a literary import.³⁵

In his autobiography, Plomer welcomes Cyril Connolly's inclusion of *Turbott Wolfe* in his *100 Key Books of the Modern Movement from England, France & America 1880-1950*. It is an important part of what Connolly sees as the Modern Movement's 'spirit of revolt' against its own bourgeois class, as Plomer explains: 'Yet, it was in a spirit of

³⁴ Desmond MacCarthy (as Affable Hawk), 'Books in General', *NS*, 27 March 1926, p. 747.

revolt that *Turbott Wolfe* had been engendered, and I should have been surprised if it had been received locally with rapturous applause. I was pleased by the violence of the reactions it provoked [...] *Turbott Wolfe* had rubbed the open wound of South Africa's racialism'.³⁶ Connolly concludes his entry on the novel by quoting Campbell's line 'Awoke a sleepy continent to rage'.

White South Africa was especially shocked by what they saw as the novel's promotion of miscegenation, presented in the novel as a radical, taboo-breaking social doctrine encapsulated in a new political party called Young Africa, describing itself as 'An important movement for the regeneration of our country' and issuing the following manifesto:

To put it in a Nutshell, WE BELIEVE:

1. *That Africa is not the white man's country.*
2. *That miscegenation is the only way for Africa to be secured to the Africans.*
3. *That it is inevitable, right and proper.*
4. *That if it can be shown to be so, we shall have laid true foundations for the future Coloured World.*
5. *That we are pioneers.* (original italics, p. 144).

Turbott Wolfe criticises empire and South African colonial life, especially through the figure of white Mabel Van Der Horst who practices what she preaches and marries black Zachary Msomi. Her political radicalism and strong individualism are encapsulated in statements like this one: 'The white man's as dead as a doornail in this country. You gain nothing by not looking facts in the face. All this Empire-building's a blooming blind alley' (p. 137). Through her, Plomer challenges the complacency and racial prejudice of his other characters; with her and Zachary lies the future of South Africa, a point made

³⁵ Laurens van der Post, 'The *Turbott Wolfe* Affair', in William Plomer *Turbott Wolfe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 9-55 (p. 18, p.13). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

³⁶ *The Autobiography of William Plomer* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), p. 170.

clearly and forcefully by a colonist such as Plomer as early as 1925. Although the bourgeois realm of personal relationships is strongly represented in *Turbott Wolfe*, (unlike *A Passage to India*) it is neither sanctified nor mystified, nor is it redemptive, but is an expression of the wider political realm of social activism and ideological warfare. In fact, one of the more striking details about the novel (a point made by Van der Post in his introduction) is its registering of the growing influence of Bolshevism on the politics of the African continent, especially through the figure of Friston (a missionary and member of Young Africa), who dies as an agent for the communists at the end of the novel.³⁷

Turbott Wolfe's political radicalism is matched by its experimental, modernist (even Conradian) narrative form and structure, setting the narrator at a safe distance from the events he is narrating, even positioning him as a secret sharer in another man's experiences, prejudices, and opinions. Plomer sees a definite connection between the content of the novel and the form it took: 'To speak of it as a novel is perhaps a misnomer; it was a violent ejaculation, a protest, a nightmare, a phantasmagoria – which the dictionary defines as "a shifting scene of real or imagined figures"'.³⁸ In other words, for Plomer there is a strong relationship between *Turbott Wolfe*'s radical anti-imperialist politics and the shifting and changing perspective it adopts. This strongly suggests that, following *Heart of Darkness* (greatly admired by Plomer), empire and its horrors cannot

³⁷ Laurens van der Post believes that Plomer's prediction of communism's future influence in Africa is 'an impressive example of visionary writing' (p. 49). Van der Post is such an enthusiast for *Turbott Wolfe* that he has made the somewhat exaggerated claim that: 'For the first time in our literature, with *Turbott Wolfe*, a writer takes on the whole of South African life' (p. 32). For the novel to do that it should have at least engaged far more with black South Africa – that is as far as (or granting that) a novel is capable of 'taking on' (or fully representing) a country's whole 'life' or culture.

³⁸ Quoted in Cecily Lockett, '*Turbott Wolfe*: A Failed Novel or a Failure of Criticism?', *Unisa English Studies*, 25 (1987), 29-34 (p. 29). Lockett argues that critics should not neglect 'Plomer's formal radicalism' in a novel which is 'a difficult examination of basic questions of existing and belonging in Africa' (p. 29, p. 30). In the face of critics (even the later Plomer himself) who undermine the novel as the work of an enthusiastic young man, flawed, deficient and not to be taken too seriously, Lockett rightly concludes that *Turbott Wolfe* 'is a powerful and complex piece of modernist fiction' (p. 34).

be narrated or faced head on by liberal writers and readers; the horror of empire has to be distanced structurally and made safe.

Following the publication of *Turbott Wolfe*, Plomer felt effectively banished from South Africa. After a trip to Japan, he secured a place in London, and his poetry and short stories were published in various journals including *The Nation*, having Leonard Woolf as literary editor then, and MacCarthy's *NS* (at Woolf's instigation of course). The *NS* published many of Plomer's poems and some short stories (e.g. 'The Pensioner' on 13 November 1926). On Woolf's advice MacCarthy also published the poems of Roy Campbell, starting with 'The Zulu Girl' on 28 November 1926.³⁹ Both Campbell and Plomer become regular contributors to the *NS*. In 1927 alone, for example, the *NS* published the following of their poems: Campbell's 'The Making of a Poet' (27 August), 'African Moonrise' (10 September), and 'Tristan Da Cunha' (15 October), and Plomer's 'The Death of a Zulu' (26 November).

³⁹ For Woolf's help in literary London, see Plomer, *The Autobiography*, p. 175.

4.6 Winifred Holtby and *Voorslag*

South Africa was also introduced to the *NS*'s literary section by Winifred Holtby, who published two pieces on her visit to the country early in 1926 when she was on a lecturing tour for the League of Nations: 'The Third-Class Concert' (11 June 1927), which describes events on the class-divided steamer that took her to South Africa; and, 'The Voorloper Group', which features a group of South African writers 'planning the publication of a new monthly review, to be devoted to the art and literature of South Africa'.⁴⁰ What is striking about the 'Voorloper Group' is that it is a fictive account based in part on (or evoking) the founding of a short-lived South African journal that appeared for only two issues edited by none other than Roy Campbell and William Plomer called *Voorslag* (whiplash). In another twist of literary history, Holtby brings us back to Campbell and Plomer.

Voorslag was politically oppositional, radical, and aggressively pioneering, as well as being culturally elitist. In the opening editorial, Campbell emphasises the journal's open-minded approach to the race issue and sets it clearly apart from South Africa's supremacist ideology: 'In politics *Voorslag* has no party. It offers an open platform for the consideration of social and political questions free from party or racial prejudice. Whatever the concern of South Africa is the concern of *Voorslag*'.⁴¹ The journal's unconventional, dissident politics are also clearly spelt out in Plomer's review of Norman Leys' *Kenya* (1926), where he outlines the exploitative nature of empire in Kenya and argues that white South Africa should choose between living according to the tenets of colonial exploitation or those of social equality with indigenous Africa:

⁴⁰ Winifred Holtby, 'The Voorloper Group', *NS*, 13 August 1927, pp. 568- 9 (p. 568). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

It seems at last that there are only two solutions of the colour problem. One is thorough economic exploitation (which violates all possible principles of any permanent value) and the other is complete social equality (which violates nothing but an illusion) The choice of these two alternatives would seem startling to most white South Africans, but sooner or later they will have to choose. If they choose exploitation they will sooner or later be damned and overwhelmed. If they choose equality they will sooner or later be saved.⁴²

White South Africa wasn't happy with being given this choice and Campbell resigned from the editorship after Lewis Reynolds, its financial backer, demanded the journal stay away from politics and focus on literature only.⁴³

What is curious about Holtby's 'The Voorloper Group' is that it does not at all deal with the political views of the gathered group of intellectuals, and there is no hint that they are in any way unconventional or radical. Although there is no evidence in either of Holtby's two main biographies to suggest that she did actually meet Campbell and Plomer during her visit,⁴⁴ in her short story, however, the narrator is seated in the midst of the group while they are discussing their plans for the journal. Holtby draws a picture of a group of self-conceited bourgeois intellectuals, deluded enough to think that they are the forerunners of the new South Africa they will help shape through their literary journal called *Voorloper* (the forerunner): 'We knew ourselves to be people of

⁴¹ Roy Campbell, *Voorslag*, June 1926, p. 1.

⁴² Norman Leys, *Kenya*, rev. by William Plomer (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), 'Dr Leys and the Colour Question', *Voorslag*, June 1926, pp. 54-6, (pp. 55-56). Peter F. Alexander, Plomer's biographer, draws attention to the fact that Leonard Woolf actually sent Plomer Leys' *Kenya* to review (in *William Plomer: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 103). Again, the hand of Woolf in the Plomer story can be seen at work. Woolf also published both Plomer's *I Speak of Africa* (1927) and his novel *Sado* (1931) at the Hogarth Press. The *NS*'s review of Leys's *Kenya*, which was entitled 'The Black Man's Burden' (13 December 1924, pp. 302-3), sparked off a long debate in the correspondence.

⁴³ See Alexander, *William Plomer*, pp. 104-6. For a general history of the journal and its important place in South African literary history see also an early article by Alexander, 'Campbell, Plomer, Van der Post and *Voorslag*', *English in Africa*, 7 (1980), 50-59.

⁴⁴ For Holtby's exhausting six-month stay in South Africa see Chapters XII-XV in Vera Brittain, *Testament of Friendship: The Story of Winifred Holtby* (London: Macmillan, 1940; repr. Virago, 1980), pp. 186-257; and Chapter 6, ' "The Goal of all Men's Longing": South Africa and William Ballinger', in Marion Shaw, *The Clear Stream: A Life of Winifred Holtby* (London: Virago, 1999), pp. 168-98.

distinction, the pioneers, however unrecognised, of a young civilisation. What we thought today, South Africa would think tomorrow' (p. 568-9). The narrator mocks the group's avant-gardist illusions and aesthetics of high culture as articulated by the venture's chief planner (probably modelled on Campbell): ' "We are so much absorbed by the problem of how to live that we forget the enrichment of life. Yet I maintain that from the beginning there should be a few who run before, who having visualised a need, set about to fulfil it. It is for us" ' (p. 569). One of the characters enthusiastically interjects: ' "It is rather wonderful [...] to realise that it is we upon whom the future depends. Such an opportunity..." ' (p. 569). The narrator is left unimpressed by her company's idealism and, at the end, she points to the real pioneers who will shape the future of South Africa in their own image – the two Zulu servants teaching each other to read: 'We turned, and saw, crouching behind us as near to the fire as they deemed it decorous to approach, the two Zulu servants. They were using the flickering light, not hidden from them by our bodies, in order to teach each other to read out of a child's primer' (p. 569). For Holtby, change in South Africa will come from the servants reading, from the black majority, and not merely from the intellectual activities and chatter of a few white writers.

Holtby's mocking tone can in part be explained by the fact that *Voorslag*, and Campbell especially, were too elitist (arguably Arnoldian) in taste, a fact clearly expressed in such statements as the following: 'It is only in the more individualistic walks of life that an outside view can be obtained of those terrific phantoms which mould the destiny of empires and peoples – only in science, art or religion that we can escape far enough away from the collective emotions of humanity to be able to see what they really

are [...] one seldom sees any great thinker afflicted with crowd-emotions'.⁴⁵ Campbell's objectivity and disinterestedness is coupled with his idealist conception of transforming South Africa through the cultural activity of a small number of people and without the need to involve the black population in its own liberation. Holtby would clearly disagree with the notion that the production of a new South Africa is an issue solely for a minority of white scientists, artists and philosophers going against their own white majority for the sake of black Africa. Holtby would not go along with such a view because for her the pioneer and catalyst for changing South Africa is the black working class and its trade-union organisations, on whose behalf she campaigned ceaselessly until her sudden death in 1935.

The emphasis on black South Africa in the story of colonial South Africa is also a point that is strongly made in another piece by Holtby, an extended essay on South African literature written at the end of the decade and entitled 'Writers of South Africa'. It is important to note that here she is more generous to Plomer and Campbell, stating that the latter's poem 'The Flaming Terrapin' 'by far is the most important that has yet been published by a South African, and one of the most interesting written in English in this century'; and describing Plomer's *Turbott Wolfe* as 'an ardent, lyrical, exasperated, audacious study of the colour question. It was innovative; it was ferocious: it was penetrating and profoundly interesting'.⁴⁶ Holtby acknowledges the fundamental significance of both writers' cultural politics of representing black South Africa, but for

⁴⁵ Roy Campbell, 'The Significance of *Turbott Wolfe*', *Voorslag*, June 1926, pp. 39-45 (p. 41).

⁴⁶ Winifred Holtby, 'Writers of South Africa', *The Bookman*, September 1929, pp. 279-83 (p. 283). The next quotation is also from p. 283. This essay presents a detailed literary history of modern South Africa and deals with the following writers: Olive Schreiner, Sarah Gertrude Millin, Mrs. Ethelreda Lewis, Campbell, Plomer, and Pauline Smith. Smith was Arnold Bennett's protégé and author of *The Little Karoo*, intr. by Arnold Bennett (London: Cape, 1925). He acted as her literary agent in London, and she published the following piece in the *NS*: 'The Sister', 21 August 1915, pp. 470-71.

her the measure of real change again lies (or remains) with black South Africa: 'Hitherto practically all works dealing with the native races – that black majority of six to one – have been written from outside by observers of European stock. What will be really interesting is when books begin to appear written by black men and women about white ones'.

4.7 Conclusion: Cracking Empire?

Through the work of E. R. Morrough, William Plomer, Roy Campbell, and Winifred Holtby, the *NS*'s literary section registers and responds to the rise of the colonial, the non-European Other, in metropolitan culture, a process embodied in such works as Forster's *A Passage to India*, Plomer's *Turbott Wolfe*, T. E. Lawrence's *Revolt in the Desert* (1927), and Orwell's *Burmese Days* in the 30s.⁴⁷ For the historian of empire, James Morris, the post-war period is characterised as a time when empire again becomes (after Conrad and Kipling) an object of literary concern: 'Between the wars, almost for the first time, artistic intellectuals looked at the empire speculatively in its decline, and dealt with it ironically'.⁴⁸

Within the growing cultural trend of constituting the colonies as sites of fiction, the *NS* publishes the (un-ironic) work of Morrough, defined by its aesthetics and politics of imperial control and constructing Egypt as violent, inferior, and primitive. In fact, his strand of imperialism dominates the *NS*'s literary section, occupying a proportionally larger space than any other form of writing on the colonies. This is clearly in line with the Liberal-imperialist policy on the colonies advocated by its political editor Clifford Sharp,

⁴⁷ I should also mention the Sufi writer Iqbal Ali Shah and his *NS* pieces on Islam and the East. In his most important essay to be published in the *NS*, 'The Revolt of Asia', he outlines the East's growing disenchantment with the materialistic and scientific civilisation of the west and argues that it has taken the form of a religious Revivalism, a revolt against modernisation and an attempt to stem its tide (2 April 1927, pp. 764-5 (p. 765). Although Ali Shah's 'East' is an essentialised construct, it is misleading to suggest that the various national independence movements of the colonial world were revivalist or had a religious ideology. In Egypt, for example, the Wafd (the major nationalist independence party) dominated the Egyptian political scene while the Islamic Brotherhood (a revivalist party) was a minor player.

⁴⁸ *Farewell the Trumpets: An Imperial Retreat* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p. 364.

a policy that would be challenged by the journal's next editor Kingsley Martin and his support for colonial liberation movements around the world.⁴⁹

In Sharp's *NS*, however, Morrough's short stories and his colonialist aesthetics certainly do not in any way look out of place. In fact such views on colonialism and hostility towards nationalist anti-imperialist movements were widespread and dominant, finding clear expression in such disparate events as the British Empire Exhibition of 1924; the rise of social anthropology as an academic subject (especially through the work of its founder Bronislaw Malinowski at the *LSE* from 1924) – considered of potential use in the administration of the colonies at a time of imperial decline; and the rise of primitivism in the realm of art and ideas as a form of constructing Otherness.⁵⁰

This renewed intellectual engagement with empire, however, comes at a time of post-war economic decline when the British Empire had already been or was increasingly being challenged by the following forces: the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland (which played, according to Morris, a 'seminal role in the slow retreat of empire')⁵¹; the rise of nationalist colonial liberation and non-cooperation movements in the colonies; and, in both international and local politics, the rise of communist anti-imperialism and Wilsonian liberalism enshrined in the League of Nations' 'right of self-determination'. As the interwar period draws to a close, Morrough's type of imperialism starts to gradually lose its dominance over the British intellectual elite, with the simultaneous emergence of Bloomsbury's liberal-humanitarian values. It is to the *NS*'s credit that this emerging political and cultural trend can be discerned in its literary pages. Encouraged by

⁴⁹ For Sharp's typical colonial attitudes, see Kathleen Mayo, *Mother India*, rev. by Clifford Sharp, 16 July 1927, pp. 448-9.

⁵⁰ See Julian Stallabrass, 'The Idea of the Primitive: British Art and Anthropology 1918 –1930', *New Left Review* 183 (September-October 1990), 95-115.

MacCarthy in his last days as literary editor, and supported by Bloomsbury's near-hostility to empire, a critical and negative attitude towards contemporary imperialism was thus working itself out in the *NS* in the late 20s.

⁵¹ Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*, p. 245.

Chapter 5

Soviet Plans and Soviet Fiction in the 30s

5.1 Introduction

In one of his earliest literary editorials in the *NS*, J. C. Squire described the massive increase in the availability of Russian literature in English as an ‘invasion’: ‘Turgeneiff, Tolstoi, Tchekov, Dostoievsky, Gorki: the Russian invasion has been immense in the last thirty years’.¹ From the 1880s onwards, English metropolitan culture was increasingly open and susceptible to the influence of Russian fiction, a process epitomised by the career of Constance Garnett (1861-1946) who put the work of many nineteenth century canonical Russian writers into English for the publishers Heinemann. Two of her Chekov translations, one play and one short story, even appeared in the *NS* in 1915.² The *NS*, in fact, responded to the growing public interest in Russian literature by publishing some itself. 1913 stands out as a particularly good year for Russian fiction, when the *NS* published no less than six Russian short stories which were specially translated for the journal by John Cournos (1881-1966).³

¹ J. C. Squire (as Solomon Eagle), ‘Books in General’, *NS*, 12 July 1913, p. 439.

² Anton Tchekov, ‘A Slander’, trans. by Constance Garnett, *NS*, 6 March 1915, pp. 535-36; and, ‘A Play’, trans. by Constance Garnett, *NS*, 18 September 1915, pp. 566-8.

³ Anton Tchekov, ‘The Lottery Ticket’, trans. by John Cournos, *NS*, 3 May 1913, pp. 115-6; Maxim Gorki, ‘It’s Done, Father!’, trans. by John Cournos, *NS*, 7 June 1913, pp. 272-4; Anton Tchekov, ‘The Student’, trans. by John Cournos, *NS*, 16 August 1913, pp. 594-5; V. Volkhovsky, ‘The Idealist’, trans. by John Cournos, *NS*, 13 September 1913, pp. 721-2; Shalom Ash, ‘The Jewess’, trans. by John Cournos, *NS*, 8 November 1913, pp. 145-7; Feodor Sologub, ‘The White Dog’, trans. by John Cournos, *NS*, 20 December 1913, 339-40. John Cournos also translated Feodor Sologub’s ‘The Hoop’ for the *NS* (27 June 1914, pp. 371-2). Both these *NS* Sologub short stories were reprinted in Cournos’s translated collection of short stories by Feodor Sologub entitled *The Old House and Other Tales* (London: Martin Secker, 1915).

The *NS* was also active in reviewing translated Russian literary works, collections, and literary-critical studies on Russian authors which started appearing then. E. M. Forster's 1915 *NS* review 'Short Stories from Russia' is a good example of the growing critical engagement with Russian fiction. So is the publication of John Middleton Murry's *Fyodor Dostoevsky: A Critical Study* (1916) – reviewed by the Irish essayist Robert Lynd in the *NS* – and Edward Garnett's *Turgenev: A Study* (1917).⁴ The *NS*'s own extensive range of engagement with Russian fiction can also be observed in many other essays and reviews that Squire published during his time as literary editor of the journal: Arthur Ransome on Korolenko; Sydney Waterloo and L. Pearsall Smith on Aksakoff; Havelock Ellis on Tolstoy; Leonard Woolf and Maurice Baring (author of the pioneering 1910 *Landmarks in Russian Literature*) on Chekov; and an obituary of Leonid Andreiff by Sokoloff.⁵

This, at times, quite intensive activity surrounding Russian literature does not survive the *NS*'s post-war editorial changes and Squire's departure in 1920; it all but disappears under the reign of Desmond MacCarthy from 1920 to around 1928. In fact, Squire takes his interest in promoting and reviewing Russian literature to the *London Mercury*, where he publishes a series of articles on Russian fiction by D. S. Mirsky, which form part of Mirsky's celebrated literary history of Russia entitled *Contemporary*

⁴ Anton Tchekov, *The Steppe and Other Stories*, trans. by Adeline Lister Kay; Anton Tchekov, *Stories of Russian Life*, trans. by Marian Fell; Feodor Sologub, *The Old House and Other Tales*, trans. by John Cournos, rev. by E. M. Forster *NS*, 24 July 1915, pp. 373-4. Marian Fell was also a prolific translator of Russian literature, putting many Chekov plays into English. Lynd's review of Murry's *Dostoevsky* appeared on 2 September 1916, pp. 518-9.

⁵ Arthur Ransome, 'Korolenko', *NS*, 11 April 1914, pp. 17-8; Sydney Waterloo, 'Serge Aksakoff', rev. of *Years of Childhood*, by Serge Aksakoff, trans. by J. D. Duff, *NS*, 25 March 1916, pp. 595-6; Serge Aksakoff, *A Russian School Boy*, trans. by J. D. Duff, rev. by L. Pearsall Smith, *NS*, 12 January 1918, pp. 354-55; Leo Tolstoy, *The Diaries of Leo Tolstoy: Youth, 1847 to 1852*, trans. by C. J. Hogarth and A. Simis, rev. by Havelock Ellis *NS*, 22 September 1917, pp. 590-91; Leonard Woolf, 'Tchekov', *NS*, 11 August 1917, pp. 446-48; Anton Tchekov, *Letters of Anton Tchekov*, trans. by Constance Garnett, rev. by

Russian Literature, 1881-1925 (1926). Unfortunately, no such contribution to the Russian literary scene comes out of MacCarthy's *NS*. In fact, the lull in Russian literary affairs in the *NS* in the 20s – though sometimes ruptured by the odd review or two (like Virginia Woolf's drama-review of Chekov's *The Cherry Orchard* or MacCarthy's two 1926 reviews of Chekov's plays), short story (like A. Averchenko's 'The Sluggard'), or essay (like D. S. Mirsky's piece celebrating the work of anti-Bolshevik poet Marina Tsvetayeva) – is only really overcome in the early 30s, when David Garnett (son of Russophiles Edward and Constance Garnett) assumes the chair of literary editor and Kingsley Martin becomes editor of the journal.⁶

Finally, it is important to note that when MacCarthy was ignoring Russia in the literary section of the *NS*, the political section was very busy reporting on it. Throughout the 20s, the Soviet Union was analysed, discussed, debated, and corresponded over on a very regular basis in the political pages of the *NS*. Regular contributions often came from the editor Clifford Sharp, C. M. Lloyd (long-time deputy editor and lecturer in politics at the *LSE*) and G. D. H. Cole (regular contributor on labour and economic affairs); the odd political essay or article from outside the ranks of regular *NS* contributors was also published.⁷ This *political* interest in Soviet affairs is sustained in the *NS* throughout the interwar period. When *literary* interest in Russia does finally return to the *NS* in the early

Maurice Baring *NS*, 21 February 1920, pp. 585-6; and A. Sokoloff, 'Leonid Andreiff', *NS*, 15 November 1919, pp. 190-91.

⁶ Virginia Woolf, 'The Cherry Orchard', *NS*, 24 July 1920, pp. 446-7; Desmond MacCarthy, 'Tchehov', *NS*, 6 March 1926, pp. 645-6; Desmond MacCarthy, 'The Cherry Orchard: The New Production', *NS*, 2 October 1926, p. 706; A. Averchenko, 'The Sluggard', *NS*, 28 February 1925, pp. 596-7; D. S. Mirsky, 'Marina Tsvetayeva', *NS*, 27 February 1926, pp. 611-3.

⁷ The following are some yearly samples from 1920 to 1925: Clifford Sharp [unsigned], 'The Fate of Bolshevism', *NS*, 5 June 1920, pp. 241-3; C. M. Lloyd [unsigned], 'The Twilight of Bolshevism', *NS*, 5 February 1921, pp. 523-4; C. M. Lloyd [unsigned], 'What Russia Wants', *NS*, 25 November 1922, pp. 225-6; S. M. K[azarine], 'The Soviet Press', *NS*, 9 June 1923, pp. 260-61; G. D. H. Cole, 'The Socialism of Nikolai Lenin', *NS*, 2 February 1924, pp. 472-3; C. M. Lloyd [unsigned], 'The Fall of Trotsky', *NS*, 24 January 1925, pp. 437-8.

30s, it comes back with a vengeance in the form of Michael Zoshchenko, a contemporary Soviet author who turns out to have the largest number of fiction contributions to the journal by any one individual not only in the 30s but in the period from 1913 to 1939 as a whole. The main aim of this chapter is to discuss Zoshchenko's more than a dozen *NSN*⁸ short stories, examine his representation of post-revolutionary Soviet society, and analyse its relationship to some other attitudes towards the Soviet Union in the 30s.

⁸ The *NS* merged with its liberal rival the *Nation* in 1931, bringing John Maynard Keynes as new Director and Kingsley Martin as new editor [*NSN*, hereafter].

5.2 Against Anti-Bolshevism: Understanding Stalin's Russia

The *NSN*'s political attitude towards the Soviet Union in the early 30s can be gauged by referring to two works published in the journal in 1931: the first, an essay by Michael Farbman (author of *After Lenin: The New Phase in Russia* (1924)) entitled 'The Anti-Bolshevik Creed'; the second, a six-part series of articles entitled 'Russian Notes' and written by deputy-editor Mostyn Lloyd after his visit to the Soviet Union in 1931 as a special correspondent for the journal. Both authors call for a factual, realistic assessment and understanding of Soviet Russia, and both reject (émigré) scare-mongering about Russian potentialities of world economic domination resulting from the Five Year Plan, taking the form of Soviet 'dumping' of cheap goods in western markets or the wrenching away of Asian markets from capitalist control.⁹ Farbman takes up and deals with this issue head on and argues that Russian émigrés have sought to exaggerate the success of the Plan in order to 'frighten the capitalist world into a policy of retaliation and boycott' and force it to declare an embargo on Russian goods:

The scare can now be said to have crystallised almost into a creed, the three articles of which are: (1) The aim of the Plan is to enable Russia to swamp the world with cheap goods; (2) these goods are being produced by forced labour; and (3) they are being dumped in foreign countries with the object of ruining trade and destroying the capitalist system.¹⁰

Farbman refutes all these claims and counter argues that Soviet Russia poses no threat to world trade since: 'First, Russian exports represent two per cent. only of the world export

⁹ The Five Year Plan, begun by Stalin in 1928, was a new economic plan which initiated a process of accelerated industrialisation and collectivisation of the land. It resulted in a vast increase in industrial production, something which Trotsky and the Left Opposition had been calling for since 1923, though they came to oppose the Plan's speed-up techniques and Stalin's policy of forcible collectivisation which led to great hardship and suffering for the population. The Plan replaced the New Economic Plan (NEP) instituted by Lenin and Trotsky in 1921 in order to revive the Russian economy (ravaged by WW1 and the Civil War) through temporarily restoring limited free trade and foreign concessions within the safeguards of a predominantly nationalised and planned economy.

trade and, secondly, Russia's imports are much in excess of her exports' (p. 137).

According to Farbman, the Five Year Plan does not represent a real threat to capitalist domination of world trade. Calling for an embargo of Russian goods is counter productive and would only force Russia to concentrate her efforts on conquering the Asiatic markets, thus adversely affecting the position of British trade. The real 'menace to western capitalism' (Farbman's phrase) is the Plan's ideological underpinnings, the fact that it is 'founded on the belief that a socialist system of production, accumulation and distribution is superior to a capitalist one' (p. 137).¹¹

Countering anti-bolshevism is also the implicit aim of Mostyn Lloyd's six-part series of articles on Soviet Russia, which, taken together, constitute one of the most sustained attempts by the *NS* in the interwar period to explain Soviet politics and society. Lloyd, who had been *de facto* editor of the journal in the late 20s, and until Kingsley Martin's arrival in 1931, was ideally suited to undertake such a detailed examination of a foreign country. He combined his time on the *NS* with acting as the head of the Department of Social Science and Administration at *LSE* from 1922 to 1944. His contributions to the *NS* cover the full range of the labour movement's activities: trade unionism (on which he published *Trade Unionism* in 1915), labour, unemployment, and local government issues as well as foreign affairs.¹² As a result, and as 'Russian Notes'

¹⁰ Michael Farbman, 'The Anti-Bolshevik Creed', *NSN*, 21 March 1931, pp. 137-38 (p. 137). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹¹ Many of the arguments against scare-mongering put forward by Farbman can be found in a *Guardian* interview conducted with Leon Trotsky earlier in the year on the 'Five-Year Plan and the World' where he argues that the Plan has caught out capitalist *laissez-faire* economies by showing the effectiveness of centralised economic planning and proving that 'a nationalised industry, even in a backward country, can increase at a tempo that none of the old civilised nations could possibly attempt'. See, Leon Trotsky, 'Interview by the *Manchester Guardian*, February 1931', *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1930-1931)*, 14 vols (New York: Pathfinder, 1973), IV, pp. 171-9 (p. 174).

¹² See Adrian Smith 'Lloyd, Charles Mostyn (1878-1946)', in *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, ed. by John Bellamy, John Saville, David E. Martin (London: Macmillan, 1972-), VII, pp. 146-8.

demonstrates, he was able to discuss comfortably a range of issues and problems relating to the functioning and organisation of the Russian State under the Plan. In the following, and because Lloyd's series is fairly unknown as a source of information on Russia under the Plan (though it was published by the Hogarth Press in their Day to Day Pamphlets series),¹³ I would like to briefly outline and discuss each article's main ideas and arguments, and, hopefully, also convey the extent to which some interwar Socialist intellectuals engaged with events and developments in Stalin's Russia. Lloyd's series also helps furnish the appropriate historical and political context which is essential for understanding the significance of the appearance of Russian fiction in the *NS* at the time.

'Russian Notes' are divided as follows:

1) The Workers State:¹⁴ Lloyd emphasises Russian workers' sense of importance and pride after ceasing to be 'wage slaves': 'They have an air of "liberty, equality and fraternity". They are no longer the "lower classes"' (p. 399). Though rationing and food and clothes shortages exist, Russians are not in 'a mood of misery and dejection' (p. 400). Higher wages (70% rise since 1914), cheap food, and communal housing provisions have balanced the scales. Furthermore, Lloyd is left unmoved by western critics who say that though the Russian worker has 'improved his material lot' he is still 'living under a tyranny that allows him no genuine political rights, and aims at mechanising him into a robot' (p. 400). Is democracy or a parliament really what the Russian worker now wants, he asks, and adds: 'But is it not important to remember the history of the Russian worker and his difference in traditions and environment from his British and American brothers?'

¹³ C. M. Lloyd, *Russian Notes* (London: Hogarth Press, 1932).

(p. 400). This call for cultural relativism in understanding Russia is also sounded at the very beginning of the essay when he clearly states that: 'Bolshevism has its darker sides, and Russia is not England; but it is not Bogyland' (p. 399). Russia, Lloyd argues, is a different country from ours and should be understood according to its own, very specific terms and traditions. In order to really understand the position of the Russian worker one should remember that '[t]he revolution deprived him of no rights that he had before. On the contrary it gave him a new status, an equality that appears as a pre-eminence and – within certain limits, which may seem very large to him – liberties of speech and criticism, methods of expressing his will, that may be as good as, or better than, those enjoyed under parliamentary democracy' (p. 400). Unlike some western critics, the Russian worker is himself far from being worried about the processes of speeding up the mechanisation of industry and agriculture; on the contrary, Lloyd affirms, he feels excited about the new adventure he is embarking on. Such positive experiences are strongly reinforced at the end of the piece as well, where the image of Russians 'working solidly, cheerfully or enthusiastically at the Herculean task of the Five Year Plan' is invoked (p. 401).

2) How the Plan Works:¹⁵ This piece provides facts and figures about the Five Year Plan, which is 'achieving great results' in industry and agriculture (p. 430). Soviet Russia is busily producing trucks, tractors, cars, iron, coal, oil, collective farms, shoes, chocolate, artificial silk, macaroni, and cotton. Though there are some shortages in labour, management, and trained specialists, it is absurd to suggest, Lloyd argues, that

¹⁴ C. M. Lloyd, 'Russian Notes: I. The Workers' State', *NSN*, 3 October 1931, pp.399- 401. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁵ C. M. Lloyd, 'Russian Notes: II. How the Plan Works', *NSN*, 10 October 1931, pp. 430-31 Further references are given after quotations in the text.

Russia uses 'forced labour'; workers are egged on by 'propaganda, appeals to patriotism, to Socialist ideals, to personal pride and group pride, and last but not least to the pocket' (p. 431). To increase production Russians use 'socialist competition', labour 'shock brigades', and the 'piece-rate system' (which, though it does generate income inequalities, could never lead to exploitation, he is quick to observe). For Lloyd, Russia under the Plan is a country slowly working its way towards the communist ideal of '“from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs”' (p. 431).

3) The Man with the Hoe:¹⁶ This piece is wholly dedicated to assessing the Plan's agricultural policy.¹⁷ Lloyd reaffirms the notion that the collectivisation of the farms is 'the most remarkable of the of the Communists' achievements' and has been 'an astonishing success' (p. 506). Stalin has pacified the peasantry, combated their 'ignorance' and 'conservatism', and brought them civilisation, while at the same time using them to feed the rest of the country: 'The collective farm policy promises to settle the question of the food supply, to establish a Socialist system of agriculture, to turn the peasant from a menace into a pillar of the State, and to raise him from barbarism to civilisation' (p. 506). This strategy seems to gain Lloyd's admiration, and he comments that 'if the end can ever be allowed to justify the means, Stalin and his friends have shown themselves something more than clever devils' (p. 506). As to the human side of all this, Lloyd again insists that it is absurd to use English standards to make a judgement on conditions in Russia. He adds that it is also absurd to claim that discontent among the peasant population is rampant or that communism has been wholly successful in beating

¹⁶ C. M. Lloyd, 'Russian Notes: III. The Man with the Hoe', *NSN*, 24 October 1931, pp. 506-507. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁷ In his 1931 *Guardian* interview Trotsky criticised the speed of the Plan's farm collectivisation and mechanisation policy and added that it is having too harsh an effect on the smallholding farmers.

the individualistic spirit of smallholding farmers. 'It would be absurd to compare the Russian peasants to the happy harvesters in Morris's *News From Nowhere*. But it is equally absurd to depict them as a solid body of discontent, ground down by a remorseless tyranny and pining for what they have lost [...] Years of determined struggle, it is said, will be needed to overcome the prejudices of the petty property owner, and to effect the final "liquidation" of the kulak class' (p. 507).¹⁸

4) Proletarian Culture:¹⁹ This piece discusses the campaign to combat educational shortages and improve primary and secondary education through 'polytechnisation' – the linking up of schools to factories and other 'productive industry' (p. 537). Lloyd rejects the claim made by Krupskaya, Lenin's widow, that the schools Stalin has created are merely trade schools. Though he has some reservations about Stalin's educational system (that it is –with the rest of the arts and sciences – too 'heavily biased with Marxian politico-economic dogma') he still unhesitatingly declares that much of Bolshevik domestic (not foreign) propaganda is not 'merely legitimate, but praiseworthy', declaring that he prefers it to the 'ugly or vulgar' capitalist propaganda of commercial advertisements (p. 538). He does, however, feel somewhat uneasy about the censorship and control of literature, drama, and the arts, and as a result states that plays on farm collectivisation, anti-clericalism, 'counter-revolutionary intrigues' can get 'tiresome', though they can also be 'impressive [...] or amusing, according to one's temperament or

¹⁸ Soviet Russia was very often measured up against (sometimes disappointedly) Morris's post-revolutionary utopia in *News From Nowhere*. See, for example, Naomi Mitchison, *You May Well Ask: A Memoir 1920-1940* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1979), p. 192. As will be discussed below, Mitchison took part in the Fabian visit to Russia in 1932.

¹⁹ C. M. Lloyd, 'Russian Notes: IV Proletarian Culture', *NSN*, 31 October 1931, pp. 537-38. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

mood' (p. 538).²⁰ Should the visitor get bored with all this propaganda, Lloyd skilfully suggests that there is always *Aida*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Carmen*, Tchekov's *Cherry Orchard*, or Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* to be freely enjoyed. Whatever controls communists try to impose on culture, he argues, they are unsustainable and unworkable in the long run. He thus concludes his account on proletarian culture in Russia with the following reassurance: 'But I do not believe that they will destroy the freedom of the mind, and all original creative art, in Russia – or even shackle them permanently; for these will be too strong for them in the long run' (p. 538).

5) Women and Children:²¹ This piece opens with the following striking statement: 'The Soviet State, like Plato's Republic, makes the least possible discrimination between its male and female citizens. All offices and all occupations, with a very few exceptions, are open to women' (p. 603). Equality of access is matched by equality of pay, resulting in women in Russia having higher wages than their western counterparts, though the piece-rate system does tend to favour men workers. On the whole, however, even in Russia women do still end up in less-skilled and lower-paid jobs. Yet, they do receive other important provisions like maternity leave and equal social insurance from the state. Lloyd rightly insists that the greatest change in the position of women in Russia has been in the sphere of 'private relations' (p. 603). Marriage in Russia no longer involves 'subjection' and does safeguard women's property prior to marriage. Abortion is legal (and had yet to be re-criminalized by Stalin) and divorce was easy; and, unlike what some in the west

²⁰ For a laboured justification of this decline in Russian letters, especially in novel writing, as being the result of 'the compulsion upon the novelist to divert his energies into educative rather than creative channels', see R. D. Charques, 'Communism and Soviet Literature', *NSN*, 19 March 1932, pp. 391-3 (p. 392). As I will argue below, bringing literature under the control of the Party by Stalin and the bureaucracy effectively ended the creative freedom of the early-to-mid 20s.

²¹ C. M. Lloyd, 'Russian Notes: V. Women and Children', *NSN*, 14 November 1931, pp. 603-604. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

say, 'it is absurd to pretend that the Communists are deliberately trying to destroy family life' (p. 604). As to children, the state is generous in its provisions which cover education, nourishment, physical culture, medical treatment, crèches, nursery schools, kindergartens, clinics, hospitals, and sanatoria. As a result, Lloyd adds: 'The coming generation in Russia shows promise of abundant health and vigour. But this is not all. The Revolution has given the young an awe-inspiring responsibility. It has allowed them a large measure of freedom – freedom of self-expression and freedom of criticism' (p. 604). The schools and CP have also instilled in them 'a group spirit of altruism, and of juvenile zeal' (p. 604). For those who still harbour doubts or reservations, he retorts with: 'And may not the ideal of social service be a better one with which to imbue the young than that of our own Dr. Samuel Smiles, of blessed and persistent memory?' (p. 604). Finally, Lloyd rounds up the essay with the fact that the communist youth organisations like the Young Communist League and the Little Octobrists are all united in the task of moulding their own future.

6) The Dictatorship:²² This last piece is dedicated to explaining the function, position, and role of the CP, which Lloyd calls the 'prince' and 'a good disciple of Machiavelli': 'It is not the Government; it is not an organ of the Constitution. But it is in fact sovereign' (p. 665). At the head of the pyramid sits Stalin, who is 'the most powerful individual in the State' but not a 'dictator' because he is 'neither theoretically nor actually an absolute monarch' (p. 665). As a system of control, the dictatorship of the proletariat surpasses that of Italian Fascism in 'its ingenuity and its effectiveness' (p. 665). To those who say it is a dictatorship *over* the proletariat the CP retorts that it is a 'trusteeship'

²² C. M. Lloyd, 'Russian Notes: VI. The Dictatorship', *NSN*, 28 November 1931, pp. 665-66. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

conceived as an act of maintaining power by an overwhelmingly proletarian party for the benefit of the proletariat as a whole. The CP has two-and-a-half million members who can participate in democratic debate until matters under discussion get settled and crystallise into a party line to be accepted and adhered to by all. As to the GPU (combating 'political and economic counter-revolution, espionage and banditry'), though it has at times mistakenly spread 'terror and ruin', it really 'does not interfere with the ordinary Soviet citizen' (p. 665). Lloyd, thus, rejects the argument that the CP is turning into 'a new upper class, with the habits and privileges of master' – though the spread of bureaucracy should be checked (p. 666). The CP is not a closed order and: 'The tutelage it exercises is only temporary. And in any case there is no danger in exploitation for personal profit which is the mark of the bourgeois class' (p. 666). Finally, those who think Soviet Russia is arming for war are wrong; in fact many Russians themselves believe that 'the capitalists are itching for a chance to destroy Bolshevism'. It is clear to Lloyd that what Russia really wants is to be left alone: 'And so, if other people let Russia alone, she will be only too happy to let them alone' (p. 666).

'Russian Notes' appeared in the *NSN* during the election campaign of 1931 in which the Labour Party was running without Ramsey MacDonald and Philip Snowden, who had left to form a National Government with the Conservatives earlier in the year. Macdonald's Labour Government of 1929-1931 had failed over the issue of unemployment (2.7 million in 1931) and the growing world economic crisis resulting from the stock market crash of 29 October 1929. As Charles Mowat has argued:

Few governments have entered office with higher hopes and wider goodwill, few have fallen less lamented by friends as well as foes. It entered office just as the

illness of the British economy, chronic since the war, took a desperate turn, brought on by the widening world depression. Labour, by desperate remedies, might have saved the day. Instead, it followed the half-measures of its predecessors. When these failed, it forfeited the nation's confidence and opened the gate once more for the Conservatives.²³

Labour's failure is widely regarded as a turning point in interwar history, ushering in a decade of economic depression and continuous volatility in international politics.²⁴ For Socialists like G. D. H. Cole, the growing economic crisis and the split in the Labour Party demonstrated the need to reassess the Party's political strategy and tactics and to abandon the discredited liberal reformism of the MacDonald years. In 'Old Labour Party and the New', which followed one of Lloyd's Russian pieces in the *NSN*, Cole declares that Labour has failed to 'tackle either unemployment or industrial reorganisation' and that the time has come for Labour to re-affirm that only a socialist programme of government can fully represent the interests and aspirations of its working-class constituency: 'For I think the time has come to stop definitely the attempt to build up the Labour Party on the forsaken inheritance of reformist Liberalism, and to set to work instead to create a real socialist Party'.²⁵ Cole's new Labour is to go back to being a 'class party': 'Labour, if it became a national, classless party, would lose all its effective driving force' (p. 602). The task ahead for Socialists like himself, he adds, is to 'get back to straight Socialist propaganda, restated and reinterpreted in relation to the problems of today and tomorrow' so that when Labour does return to office it won't 'repeat the

²³ Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940* (London: Methuen, 1964), p. 356.

²⁴ On 1929-1931 see Mowat, pp. 353-412; and, Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), pp. 19-29.

²⁵ G. D. H. Cole, 'The Old Labour and the New', *NSN*, 14 November 1931, pp. 601-602 (p. 601). References are given after quotations in the text. Cole is a neglected figure in the history of the labour movement in Britain, though, as Neil Riddell has recently argued, he has made 'a significant contribution to the reshaping of the [Labour] party's ideology in the 1930s' ('The Age of Cole'? G. D. H. Cole and the British Labour Movement 1929-1933', *The Historical Journal*, 38 (1995), 933-57 (p. 934)).

vacillations and tinkerings of 1924 and 1929-1931, but [would be] determined to institute at once a large instalment of positive socialisation of the vital industries and services, and ready to do battle manfully with whatever stands in the way' (p. 602).²⁶

In such a context of world economic capitalist crisis, the geopolitical importance of the Soviet Union becomes immediately apparent: fast economic growth, a planned economy, no unemployment and a (claimed, at least) socialist programme of economic and political reconstruction. Many intellectuals from depressed capitalist economies felt they wanted to see for themselves what it meant to be living under such enviable conditions. Soviet Russia was therefore visited, studied, observed, and reported on throughout the 30s, but especially at the beginning of the decade when Kingsley Martin in his joint enterprise with the famous cartoonist David Low observed: 'The entire British intelligentsia has been to Russia this summer. Most of it has asked me to print its articles. I have refused the lot [...] The Russian book market is spoilt by sloppy, prejudiced, dogmatic, myopic slush'.²⁷ Martin went in 1932 in order to rectify this situation and, as his companion points out, 'to write a very serious book called "The Truth About Russia"' (p. 7).²⁸ For a socialist like Martin, the whole encounter with Russia proved to be very exciting, and his mind on his arrival was bubbling with so many questions and queries: 'I do not think I ever really hoped, though I have been a Socialist so long, to see a State really trying to become Socialist [...] How far, I wonder, is economic planning possible?

²⁶ In 1931 Cole was very active, alongside Ernest Bevin, Arthur Pugh, and many others, in setting up an organisation (a pressure group in today's terms) for the promotion of Socialism called the Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda. For details, see Margaret Cole, *The Life of G. D. H. Cole* (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 175-8. The collaboration between Bevin and Cole led to their joint authorship of a NSN pamphlet entitled *The Crisis; what is it, how it arose, what to do* (London: NSN, 1931), which called for the nationalisation of the banking system.

²⁷ David Low and Kingsley Martin, *Low's Russian Sketchbook* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1932), p. 9. References are given after quotations in the text.

[...] Then there is the whole issue of liberty. Does a belief in freedom for the individual involve a belief in political democracy? Can you produce equality and abolish class feeling by wiping out the upper class, and, if you can, is the price worth it?" ' (p. 8), and so on. It is precisely in this spirit of necessary exploration that the newly-formed New Fabian Research Bureau organised a trip to the Soviet Union in which, as G. D. H. Cole and C. R. Attlee affirm in their introduction to the resulting collection of studies, participants 'were particularly on the lookout for such features of the Soviet system as seemed likely to be of special interest and importance to Socialists in Great Britain'.²⁹ The trend of British intellectuals (Fabian or otherwise) exploring Soviet Russia is of course epitomised by Beatrice and Sidney Webb, the latter journeying from the heart of the Labour Government of 1929-1931 (where he acted as Dominions and Colonial Secretary) to Soviet Russia in 1932 and to co-writing, with Beatrice, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* (1935), to which I will return. As Martin succinctly puts it in his autobiography, summing up what many intellectuals felt about Russia, he states: 'We were all interested, one way or another, in Soviet Russia. With an army of permanent unemployed at home and no prospect of a government with a constructive policy, we could not ignore the claims of the Soviet Union to have cured unemployment and to have a national plan of development [...] We wanted to know what was really happening in the Soviet Union; it might be bad, probably was, but worth understanding'.³⁰

²⁸ Clearly, Lloyd's 'Russian Notes' were also conceived of as a contribution to Martin's 'The Truth about Russia' project.

²⁹ *Twelve Studies in Soviet Russia*, ed. by Margaret I. Cole, intro. by C. R. Attlee and G. D. H. Cole (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), p.8. Essays included, to name just a few are: Hugh Dalton on the economy, G. R. Mitchison on the Russian worker; Naomi Mitchison on Archaeology; R. W. Postgate on radio, press, and publishing; and Rudolph Messel on film. The New Fabian Research Bureau was another of the Coles' projects, set up as a think-tank for economic and social study and research.

³⁰ Kingsley Martin, *Editor: A Second Volume of Autobiography 1931-1945*, 3 vols (London: Hutchison, 1968), II, pp. 59-60.

5.3.1 Michael Zoshchenko's Early Soviet Episodes

On 14 May 1932, the *NSN* published an extensive 'Russian Supplement' with articles on Soviet politics, economics, science, and theatre. The longest and perhaps most important piece was written by Soviet Russia's most celebrated writer, Maxim Gorky. In 'The Old Man and the New', Gorky declares that contemporary Russia is decidedly creating a 'new man' who has inherited 'reason' from the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie and discarded its 'philosophy and poetry of pessimism', who 'feels himself to be master and creator of the new world', has faith in machinery, repudiates bourgeois individualism and accepts the collective: 'The aim of the new man is to free the working masses from old superstitions and prejudices of race, nation, class and religion, to create a universal brotherhood, each member of which will work according to his capacity and receive according to his need'.³¹ Such views are a far cry away from the doubts and hesitations about machinery and industrial progress expressed in Gorky's first *NS* story, ' "It is Done, Father!"', published in 1913: ' "Children of God! [...] it isn't right to wrestle with the earth like that; she'll be avenged for her wounds, and will remain unconquered!" '.³² Though the earth is 'conquered' at the end, the mysticism that comes in the form of an injured earth reaping her revenge on man does remain active and influential in the story. In the 30s, Gorky discards such superstitions for Stalin's cult of the 'new man', his machine and progress.

After spending years in critical semi-opposition to Bolshevism, arguing especially with Lenin over the aims and means of the October Revolution, Gorky returns to Russia in 1928 to uncritically support Stalin and his Five Year Plan. Gorky endorses the Plan's

³¹ Maxim Gorky, 'The Old Man and the New', *NSN* (Russian Supplement), 14 May 1932, pp. 642-5 (p. 642, p.645)

policy of forced collectivisation of farms, which went against Lenin and Trotsky's earlier policy of voluntary collectivisation and co-operation, and he ignores its cruel impact on the peasantry. Ironically, Gorky adopts the Revolution just when it has degenerated into bureaucratic state control by the Party. As Trotsky argues in his historically astute obituary of Gorky, this is hardly surprising since Gorky disliked the ' "turmoil" ' and ' "disorder" ' of the Revolution and made his peace with Russia when this ended and Russia came under the regimented control of the bureaucracy.³³ As Tovah Yedlin also argues in her recent political biography of Gorky, he openly approved of and justified Stalin's tactics, policies, and political strategies, such as the use of forced labour in the Gulag, the liquidation of the kulaks, and the trials against so called 'wreckers' and saboteurs of the Plan.³⁴ His history of involvement with the regime is long and diverse. For Stalin, Gorky also had an additional special role to play. If 'socialism in one country' had been achieved on the economic plane, why not declare then that it has also been achieved on the cultural plane as well? Gorky thus became a valuable ideological asset for Stalin, an ideological embodiment of the Plan, or, its embodiment in the realm of culture. On Gorky's return, Stalin showered him with gifts, houses, and state honours, and Gorky came to personify the myth of 'proletarian culture' and to embody what it meant to be a Soviet 'proletarian writer', helping Stalin, as Yedlin argues, bring literature under the control of the Party.³⁵

³² Maxim Gorky, ' "It is Done, Father!" ', *NS*, 7 June 1913, pp. 272-4 (p. 273).

³³ Leon Trotsky, 'Maxim Gorky', in *Leon Trotsky On Literature and Art*, ed. by Paul N. Siegel (New York: Pathfinder, 1970), pp. 217-20, p. 219.

³⁴ Tovah Yedlin, *Maxim Gorky: A Political Biography* (London: Praeger, 1999). See chapter 8, 'Gorky, 1928-1936: The Last Years', pp. 177-225. My account of Gorky owes much to Yedlin's very useful and informative work, which traces Gorky's political history in detail. To date, there is no major available biography of Gorky.

³⁵ Yedlin, *Gorky*, p. 197. Yedlin also tells the story that Stalin wanted Gorky back in Russia partly because he wanted him to write his biography in the way he had written Lenin's. When Gorky showed little interest

From Gorky's point of view, culture was all that mattered. Everything for him was always subsumed to what Trotsky called his 'worship of culture': 'In his attitude toward culture there has always remained quite a bit of fetishism and idolatry'.³⁶ It was thus Gorky's fetishist concern with culture that helped bring about his political affiliation with Stalin and his role as a sort of czar for Russian culture in the early 30s.³⁷ This, of course, required public justification of the crimes and excesses committed under the Stalinist regime, a task which Gorky duly performed.

In this atmosphere of adulation for Stalin's economic and political 'achievements', and following Kingsley Martin's return from Russia in the summer of 1932, the *NSN* starts publishing short stories by the contemporary Soviet writer Michael Zoshchenko, hailed in the journal as one of the most popular writers of post-revolutionary Russia.³⁸ His contributions to *NSN* in the 30s number 15 in all, with 5 more appearing in 1940 alone. His stories come in two batches: the first four are published between 1932-1935 and translated by (yet unidentified) I. M. and S. S. N.; the second 11 are all published between 1938-1939 and translated by Elisaveta Fen, who also wrote a long essay on Zoshchenko for the journal entitled 'A Russian Humorist'. Accordingly, I would like to divide my discussion of Zoshchenko's work into two parts, dealing with his early-to-mid 30s stories first. I would also like to suggest that publishing a Soviet author in a

in this venture, their relationships gradually deteriorated until Gorky ended up in a sort of house arrest for the last two years of his life. See Yedlin, *Gorky*, pp. 195-6.

³⁶ Trotsky, 'Gorky', p. 218.

³⁷ Stalin and 'Socialist Realism' were strangely absent from Gorky's *NSN* obituary: R. Ellis Robers, 'Maxim Gorky', *NSN*, 27 June 1936, p. 1025, which focuses on his early naturalist phase and his protection of culture from politics. A suitably entitled short story by Gorky, 'The Book', was published a fortnight later (11 July 1936, pp. 49-51), translated by the social-democratic leader Edward Bernstein, who, incidentally, also wrote 'Turgenev and the Tolstoys', *NSN*, 10 March 1939, pp. 349-50.

³⁸ It is worth noting that in the 30s the *NSN* also published the following 3 humorous sketches by Chekov, written in his early comic style, the first of which was foreworded by a long note and introduced as 'A New Story by Tchekhov': Anton Tchekhov, 'The Story of a Commercial Venture' *NSN*, 8 July 1933, pp. 44-45;

British journal means something different in the early 30s than it does in the late 30s, in the context of Stalin's purges, of Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936), and of the increasing evidence of Stalin's crimes both on the domestic and international levels (which Kingsley Martin was very much aware of since he had refused to publish George Orwell's piece on the Spanish Civil War, uncovering the CP's crimes against the anarchists POUM, on the grounds that it was against the *NSN*'s political policy). It is also important to bear in mind that most if not all of Zoshchenko's stories, though published in the journal in the 30s, were actually written and published in the Soviet Union in the 20s, when CP policy towards art was non-doctrinal and inspired by Leon Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* in which he rejected *proletcult*-like notions of 'proletarian culture' and argued for the freedom of self-determination in art. In fact, Trotsky's position was adopted and made official by a widely publicised resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of 1 July 1925 which stated:

The communist critic must be free from any form of pretentious, semi-literate and self-satisfied communist superiority... The Party favours the free competition of literary schools and currents... Any other solution would be formal and bureaucratic... The Party will not grant any group a monopoly position, even a group that is completely proletarian in its ideas. This would be tantamount to a destruction of proletarian literature itself. The Party believes it is necessary to root out every kind of high-handed and incompetent administrative interference in literary matters.³⁹ (Original spacing)

Zoshchenko, like many others, benefited from this policy. Most of his short stories which appeared in *NSN* belonged to this 20s period, though they were actually published in the journal in the 30s, when the Soviet CP began practising its hegemony over literature and

Anton Chehov, '“A Fishy Affaire”', trans. by Hubert Butler, *NSN*, 19 January 1935, pp. 73-4; Anton Tchegov, 'Unsuccess', trans. by Marjorie Hatton, *NSN*, 13 April 1935, p. 521.

³⁹ Quoted in Ernest Mandel, *Trotsky As Alternative*, trans. by Gus Fagan (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 159-160. For a direct discussion of CP policy on art (held on 9 May 1924), where Trotsky responds to his Party critics of *Literature and Revolution*, see 'Class and Art', in *Leon Trotsky on Art and Literature*, ed. by Paul Siegel (New York: Pathfinder, 1970), pp. 63-82.

culture through ‘Socialist Realism’, officially adopted at the first Soviet Writers Congress in August 1934.⁴⁰ For *NSN* readers of Zoshchenko’s short stories such an undisclosed disjunction or mismatch between the dates of the stories’ production in Russia and their appearance in the journal in Britain would have generated a representational and ideological illusion, in which the reader would be seeing Russia of the late 30s through the lenses of the 20s. This could result in the confusion of thinking that Stalin’s Russia was far more democratic and tolerant of criticism and dissent than it was in reality, or that Zoshchenko’s (in fact) 20s fiction was a typical example of Socialist Realism.

‘The Fine Lady’ is the first Zoshchenko short story to be published in the *NSN*. It has a unique narrative structure and is told by Grigori Ivanovitch, the character who is directly experiencing the narrated events. This provides the actual narrator (and Zoshchenko) with some measure of distance from the happenings and perspective adopted by Grigori the character-narrator. This Russian formalist narrative technique is called *skaz* and was widely used in Russia in the 20s. As well as being an act of narrative distancing, it is also a shifting of narrative responsibility to an invented or imagined substitute narrator that has similarities with Bakhtin’s double-voiced dialogism in incorporating the alien and other.⁴¹ As Edward J. Brown argues in his classic *Russian Literature since the Revolution*: ‘*Skaz* involves telling the story, or expressing certain

⁴⁰ For a brief account of ‘Socialist Realism’ see Victor Terras, ‘The Twentieth Century: The Era of Socialist Realism, 1925-53’, in *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, ed. by Charles A. Moser, revised ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 458-519, pp. 492-4. See also Boris Kagarlitsky, *The Thinking Reed: Intellectuals and the Soviet State 1917 to the Present*, trans. by Brian Pearce (London: Verso, 1988), especially chapter 3, ‘The Bureaucratic Labyrinths, or The Rule of the Game’, pp. 77-127, where he concludes that: ‘In a country which was moving further and further away from socialism it had, along with propaganda, to create the illusion of “socialist construction”. “Socialist realism” was, in the strictest sense, opium for the people, sedating and stupefying them’ (p. 120).

⁴¹ For an extensive discussion of the reception of *skaz* in Zoshchenko’s writings, see chapter 2, ‘*Skaz* and Mimesis’, Gregory Carlton, *The Politics of Reception: Critical Constructions of Mikhail Zoshchenko* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), pp. 31-58.

feelings or ideas about the events of the story, from the viewpoint and in the speech style of one of the characters'.⁴² For Brown, Zoshchenko, like many other Russian writers in the 20s (Babel, Pilnyak, Zamyatin) used *skaz* because 'it made possible the inclusion in novels and stories of critical or satirical comments on Soviet life for which the author would not have to take responsibility'. That some writers used this literary device for those reasons is certainly possible, though such a perspective tends also to unfairly imply that writers who were neither for nor against communism had something to fear from the Soviet authorities. A better explanation for what is effectively a fragmentation of the authorial narrative voice can be found in Leon Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* (1925), Trotsky's masterly contribution to the debate on the role of culture in the transitional period between capitalism and socialism and his views on the existing literary tendencies in Russia. Trotsky argues that the old bourgeois centre which used to provide writers with their literary orientation has gone, with no clear alternative structure yet supplanted in its place:

The Revolution overthrew the bourgeoisie, and this decisive fact burst into literature. The literature which was formed around a bourgeois centre is no more. Everything more or less vital, which remained in the field of culture, and this is especially true of literature, tried, and still tries, to find a new orientation. In view of the fact that the bourgeoisie no longer exists, its centre can be only the people, without the bourgeoisie.⁴³

Trotsky argues that writing, as a practice of representation, was deeply affected by the collapse of bourgeois hegemony over culture and society. *Skaz*, as a literary technique of narration, can accordingly be seen as an expression or articulation of the post-revolutionary crisis of representation in the sphere of literature. Thus when Zoshchenko,

⁴² Edward J. Brown, *Russian Literature since the Revolution*, revised and enlarged ed. (London: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 78-79. Next quotation is from p. 79.

Pilnyak and others symbolically hand over the reigns of the narrative to one of their characters, this is an undermining of the old authorial power of the all-knowing, all-responsible, omnipotent bourgeois narrator by a formal device. The voice of the actual narrator is handed over to another who narrates his own story while the actual narrator seemingly stands idly by. The new voice is the voice of the people experiencing the events. Trotsky has a historical-political explanation for this confusion of voices or loss of original voice: bourgeois society is no more and writers are looking for a different centre. Zoshchenko responds to this post-revolutionary de-centredness by speaking, as I will argue, through the people he is narrating.

Zoshchenko's 'The Fine Lady' is thus Grigori Ivanovitch's story about his fine lady. Addressing the reader in the opening sentences Grigori says: 'Yes, boys, certainly, I've fallen for a fine lady in my time. Paraded down the street with her and taken her to the theatre. And it was in the theatre it all happened. In that very theatre, boys, she unfolded her ideology full volume'.⁴⁴ His petty bourgeois pride at having a fine lady by his side is immense. Practically penniless and 'just like a blinking peacock, like one of the unslaughtered bourgeoisie', he offers her to eat one of the cakes on display in the theatre's cafeteria, at which point she starts swiping one cake after another: 'She finishes the one with cream and swipes another. I even managed a cough. But I didn't say a word. That damn-foolish bourgeois shame came all over me. You know, gentleman with a lady sort of thing, and no money' (p. 232). Grigori panics but fails to stop her biting on the fourth cake. The resulting argument with the proprietor over whether he should pay for

⁴³ Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1925; repr. London: Redworks, 1991), pp. 46-7.

⁴⁴ Mikhail Zoshchenko, 'The Fine Lady', *NSN*, 27 August 1932, pp. 231-2 (p. 231). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

three or four cakes leaves him with not a penny in his pocket and feeling miserable and cheated. To top this off, his date tells him at the end of the evening that those with no money should not go out with fine ladies. He replies that ‘ “Not in money, citizeness, is happiness” ’ and ends his story with: ‘I don’t care for fine ladies’ (p. 232).

Folly is also the theme of ‘A Dog’s Nose’, also set in a tenement building and written using *skaz*. Here the unnamed narrator tells the story of Eremai Babkin who brings a criminal investigation detective-dog in order to find out who stole his racoon fur-coat. The dog turns out to have a unique quality, and whoever it sniffs confesses to a crime they had committed. The house manager, for example, collapses with: ‘ “Bind me [...] good people true, conscientious citizens. I collected,” he says, “the money for the water-rate, and then expended that very money on my private lusts” ’.⁴⁵ The tenants panic and are thrown into confusion wondering what a ‘ “marvellous sort of dog be this” ’. When even the dog’s handler confesses to a crime, the narrator interjects with: ‘What happened after that – no one knows. I made myself scarce as fast as I could, away from sin’.

This short story was succeeded by an editorial comment worth quoting in full because it provides a unique insight into the way in which Zoshchenko was presented and critically assessed in Britain.

Mikhail Zoshchenko, born in 1895, is one of the most popular writers of post-revolutionary Russia. He has been called by Russians the N. E. P. Tchekov, but beyond the fact that both have written short stories and plays an English reader will notice few similarities. His stories are very short, hardly more than a thousand words long, his plays are mostly one-acters, but he has written enough of these, and of essays and humorous verse, to fill seven volumes in the collected edition of his works [issued in 1929-1931]. In his determination to be amused by and to see something ludicrous in everything, he resembles most closely American humorists of the old tradition, starting with Artemus Ward. Possibly

⁴⁵ Mikhail Zoshchenko, ‘A Dog’s Nose’, *NSN*, 15 October 1932, p. 446.

what the Russians imply by the label they have given him is that, as Tchekhov expressed the pessimism of the bourgeoisie in the period of declining capitalism, so Zoshchenko expresses the cynical “fellow-traveller” – all that is left to the bourgeoisie of the period of its gradual extermination by N. E. P. and the economic plan.

Zoshchenko does not sing the praises of communism, or hail the arrival of the October Revolution. The voices he clings onto to are those of the ‘fellow-travellers’, a phrase used by Trotsky in *Literature and Revolution* to describe those who are not whites, nor émigrés or revolutionaries but who accepted the Revolution while remaining distant from it. As such: ‘They are not the artists of the Revolution, but her artist “fellow-travellers”, in the sense in which this word is used by the old Socialists’.⁴⁶ Trotsky dedicates the longest chapter of his book to the writings of fellow-travellers since he regards their art to be the most important component part of the art of the transitional period, out of which will come the socialist art of the future. Zoshchenko himself was a fellow-traveller and belonged to a loose grouping called the ‘Serapion Fraternity’ who strongly believed in the independence of art from political or social creeds. Named after E. T. A. Hoffman’s hermit Serapion, the ‘brotherhood’ (as they were also called) first met in February 1921 and was very much influenced by Victor Shklovsky and Evgeny Zamyatin, under the patronage of Maxim Gorky who arranged for them to meet in the House of Art in Petrograd. As Brown comments: ‘They proclaimed only freedom from proclamations and demanded only that art be allowed to exist and to develop independently of doctrines and parties, camps and classes’.⁴⁷ They were all in their twenties; some, like Lev Lunts, were looking for inspiration from the west, other, like Zoshchenko, found it in Gogol and the

⁴⁶ Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 90.

⁴⁷ Brown, *Russian Literature*, p. 71. For more information see Hongor Oulanoff, *The Serapion Brothers: Theory and Practice* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966). Victor Shklovsky thought that Zoshchenko lacked

Russian tradition. What all had in common was a belief in artistic production independent of ideology, as Lunts put it: 'We demand only one thing: a work of literature must be organic, real, live its own special life'.⁴⁸ In a joint publication which came to be known as 'Serapion Autobiographies', Zoshchenko published a brief essay entitled 'About Myself, Ideology and Some Other Stuff as Well'. Here he discusses his social background (his father was a painter), career before becoming a writer (carpenter, Red Army officer, shoemaker's assistant, clerk, actor, telephone operator, etc.) and, most interestingly, his views on literature and ideology. He acknowledges the pressures on today's writers to commit to an ideology ('everyone's demanding ideology from a writer') and declares that he is not a party man: 'These party types think that I'm an unprincipled person. Let them. As for myself I'll say outright: I'm not a communist, not an SR [Social Revolutionary], not a monarchist, I'm just a Russian and politically indifferent at that [...] I don't have any hostility for anyone – that's my "precise ideology"'.⁴⁹ He generally feels he is socially and ideologically closer to the communists: 'In a general sense I'm closer to the bolsheviks. And I'm willing to bolshevize with them' – because he is not a spiritualist, doesn't like women or his family but loves 'old-fashioned Russia' (p. 22-3). As to contemporary writers, he declares that: 'I can only read myself and Lunacharsky [Soviet Commissar of Education]'. Zoshchenko's humorous and ironic presentation of his ideas is significantly playful and ambiguous. While, for example, he says he is not a communist, he also says that he served in the Red Army, shares many of the communists

confidence about his writing and was too quiet during meetings. See his *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs, 1917-1922*, trans. by Richard Sheldon (London: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 266-8.

⁴⁸ Oulanoff, *The Serapion Brothers*, p. 27.

⁴⁹ Zoshchenko's essay is luckily reproduced in full in Carlton, *The Politics of Reception*, pp. 22-4, p. 22. References are given after quotations in the text. For an autobiographical approach to Zoshchenko see Linda Hart Scatton, *Mikhail Zoshchenko: Evolution of a Writer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

values, and admires a communist revolutionary writer most. He swings both ways and vacillates between communism and non-communism, and this is what characterises his attitude toward the Revolution. To acknowledge both proximity to and distance from the Revolution is a dual process described by Trotsky when he said that fellow-travellers were impossible without the Revolution yet not revolutionary writers themselves: 'all of them were impossible without the Revolution, either as a group, or separately'.⁵⁰ They are in a sense products of the Revolution who want to be independent from it, and this is especially true of the Serapions, as Trotsky argues:

The 'Serapion Fraternity' are youngsters who still live with the brood. Some of them have not come to the Revolution through literature, but have come into literature through the Revolution. Just because they trace their brief pedigree from the Revolution, they, some of them at least, have an inner need to move away from the Revolution, and to protect the freedom of their work from its social demands. It is as if they feel for the first time that art has its own rights.

Trotsky captures the position of a writer like Zoshchenko by employing the logic of 'both', both of the Revolution and distant from it, both a by-product of the Revolution and removed from it in the same stroke. This is also the position of Zoshchenko's characters. Zoshchenko finds a narrative voice in those who see the Revolution happening around them, accept it, work with it, use its language, but don't really understand it and are somewhat alienated from it. Their lives and stories are told with friendly humour and an eye for ordinary, everyday details, as is clearly demonstrated in the remaining two stories of the first batch.

'Pelageya' gently ridicules Soviet attempts to wipe out illiteracy in the land. The fact that Zoshchenko here doesn't use *skaz* casts more doubt on Brown's point that Soviet

1993). No mention is made by either Carlton or Scatton of the fact Zoshchenko was published in the *NSN*, or of Elisaveta Fen.

⁵⁰ Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 89. Next quotation is from p. 102.

writers in the 20s were taking cover behind their narrator-characters out of fear of criticising the regime directly. Zoshchenko's main protagonist, Pelageya, though the wife of a high-ranking Soviet official is herself illiterate. This contradiction causes much discomfort at home and her husband is deeply embarrassed by her lack of willingness to become literate. When he brings her the most modern 'Self-Taught Primer', she thinks it will come in handy for her descendants; not for her the written word. Until one day, while mending her husband's shirt she finds a letter hidden in his pocket and becomes very suspicious: ' "Can it be," she thinks, "that Ivan Nikolaivitch deceives me? Can it be that he is carrying on a correspondence with Society ladies, and laughing at me, poor illiterate fool?" ' .⁵¹ To push the point further, the narrator adds: 'And for the first time in her life Pelageya was sorry that she did not know how to read' (p. 314). Pelageya believes that the letter could potentially transform her life: ' "Perhaps the contents will change my whole life, make it better for me to go back to the village – back to work on the farm" ' (p. 314). She gets motivated to become literate in order to find out the truth about her relationship with her husband. After three months of daily study, gradually making sense of, first, syllables then letters and sentences, she succeeds in reading the letter. To her great surprise, it is addressed to 'Respected Comrade Kuchkin' from Maria Blokhina of the Russian CP, who urges upon him not to forget the ones nearest to him in his efforts to liquidate 'illiteracy throughout the Republic': ' "I am sending you the promised ABC. With its aid I think your wife will be able to master the whole craft completely in about 2-3 months. Promise, my dear, to make her do it. Urge upon her, make clear to her, how

⁵¹ Mikhail Zoshchenko, 'Pelageya', *NSN*, 17 September 1932, pp. 313-4 (p. 314). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

disgusting it is to stay an illiterate old woman” ’ (p. 314). The story ends with Pelageya bursting into tears and feeling deeply insulted.

Zoshchenko here pokes fun at one of the most important tasks of post-Revolutionary Russia: the liquidation of illiteracy and the spread of education. It was a central part of the NEP and of the transitional period from capitalism to socialism. Quoting the following from Lenin’s ‘On Co-operation’ (1923), Trotsky, in his *Problems of Everyday Life* (1924), affirms that because the dictatorship of the proletariat has already been achieved, is being protected by the Red Army and supported by a nationalised means of production and a monopoly on foreign trade, the tasks of the Revolution have shifted from political (used in a restricted sense) to cultural work:

We have to admit (he says) that there has been a radical modification in our whole outlook on socialism. The radical modification is this: formerly we placed, and had to place, the main emphasis on the political struggle, on revolution, on winning political power, etc. Now the emphasis is changing and shifting to peaceful, organisational, ‘cultural’ work. I should say that emphasis is shifting to educational work, were it not for our international relations, were it not for the fact that we have to fight for our position on a world scale. If we leave that aside, however, and confine ourselves to internal economic relations, the emphasis in our work is certainly shifting to education.⁵²

For Lenin and Trotsky (the engineers of the October Revolution), if it weren’t for international capitalist hostility, nothing would take away from what Trotsky also called ‘the struggle for culture’ or, elsewhere, the process of ‘*culturalization*’.⁵³ Having conquered political power, the tasks ahead, Trotsky warns, could be wrongly perceived as

⁵² Leon Trotsky, ‘Not by Politics Alone’, in *Problems of Everyday Life: Creating the Foundations for a New Society in Revolutionary Russia* (New York: Pathfinder, 1973), pp. 15-24 (p. 16). Next quotation is from p. 17. The first nine chapters of this Pathfinder edition were published in Russia as *Problems of Everyday Life*. Some of the other articles in this Pathfinder compilation are taken from *Culture in the Transitional Epoch* (1927), one of Trotsky’s last books to be officially issued in Russia. See George Novack’s introduction for more information.

⁵³ For *culturalization*, which Trotsky called ‘the most important part of the work of building socialism’ once political power had been conquered, see ‘Leninism and Library Workers’ Clubs’, in *Problems*, pp. 288-319 (p. 318).

‘petty jobs’: they are central to the building of future socialist culture and society, for ‘
“history knows of no big jobs without petty jobs”’.⁵⁴

This project of post-revolutionary education and the communist values that inform it are never directly attacked by Zoshchenko in ‘Pelageya’. He writes on illiteracy because it exists as a social condition which affects the lives of people in Russia. What strikes him most about it, and what is central to the story, is that literacy is not being adopted for communist reasons or for the pursuit of communist ideals but for something more basic: human weaknesses. Pelageya learns how to read and write not in order to contribute to the creation of socialist culture nor in order to liquidate her own illiteracy and overcome her backwardness (as the Party has it): she does it out of jealousy and fear of deceit. Zoshchenko sees a gap between official CP policy and everyday social life. People don’t do things because they are progressive or want to go along with CP policy, but to satisfy their own individual needs and curiosities. Zoshchenko sticks to the ‘people’ and the way (he thinks) they experience the Revolution. Such a conception and ideological practice, that whatever the aims and purposes of the Revolution the ‘truth’ about it lies with the people, was a dominant 20s fellow-travelling structure of feeling identified and branded by Trotsky as ‘a new Soviet populism, without the traditions of the old populism and – up to now – without political perspective’.⁵⁵ For Zoshchenko, the ‘people’ and the Revolution are separate entities. His characters are generally confronted with the new social arrangements and they experience them as received entities to be

⁵⁴ Trotsky, ‘Not by Politics’, p. 17.

⁵⁵ Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 90. Russian populism (or *narodnichestvo*), as Hamza Alavi argues in his entry on ‘Populism’ in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. by Tom Bottomore et al., 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 431-432, saw capitalist development as a ‘retrogressive rather than a progressive social process’ which Russia could avoid by building socialism through peasant communes. Lenin refused to reject populism in its entirety because it did have a progressive tendency: ‘While

dealt with, worked with, and manoeuvred around. His characters are not revolutionaries themselves; they are de-politicised and live under the Revolution.

This structure or mode of representation is also repeated in 'Golosh', the last of the early *NSN* pieces. 'Golosh' pokes fun at the emerging bureaucracy and red tape (a worthier object of ridicule), which Trotsky called 'Form without content' and a 'diabolical enemy'.⁵⁶ The first-person narrator in this short piece chronicles in quick succession the series of steps he is forced to undertake in order to recover the golosh he had lost on a tram earlier in the day. The lost property officials tell the narrator that they need a certain document which can only be issued by his house committee, certifying the authenticity of his claims and explicitly stating that he did really lose his golosh. When this is duly issued and he retrieves his lost golosh he marvels at the efficiency of the bureaucracy: ' "how marvellously works the organisation of the State. Would they in some backward country have taken so much time and trouble over my golosh? No, they would just have thrown it out of the tram – and that would have been that. While here – barely a week have I applied, and they issue it me back. What organisation!" ' .⁵⁷ Admiring the organisation of the state is what remains for him to do at the end, after having irretrievably lost his second golosh while waiting for the first to be returned.

characterising populist ideology as economic romanticism, a backward-looking petty bourgeois utopia, Lenin opposed one-sided condemnation of populism' (p. 431).

⁵⁶ Trotsky, 'Leninism and Library Work', in *Problems of Everyday Life*, pp. 143-61 (p. 152, p. 157).

⁵⁷ Mikhail Zoshchenko, 'The Golosh', *NS*, 12 October 1935, p. 493.

5.3.2 Elisaveta Fen's Late 30s Zoshchenko

Between 'The Golosh' and 1938 nothing by Michael Zoshchenko is published in the *NSN*. When Zoshchenko does return to the journal it is through the translations of Elisaveta Fen, whose name in Britain is indelibly associated with his and, more famously, with that of Chekov, whose plays she translated for Penguin in 1959.⁵⁸ Her career as a translator in England started in 1925, when, through the contacts she had developed working as a typist-secretary, interpreter, and translator at the Moscow office of the Quaker Friends Relief Units, she got one of her translations from Russian published by the Soviet-enthusiasts Douglas Garman and Edgell Rickword in their *The Calendar of Modern Letters*.⁵⁹ After her divorce from her English husband in 1929, she decided to focus on translating Russian literature since it was very well paid and could provide her with a high level of financial security. Her own literary aspirations had, as a result, to be put on hold, though she did manage to publish two of her own short stories in *New Stories* (the periodical run by Edward J. O'Brien and H. E. Bates) and a novel called *Rising Tide* (1936).⁶⁰ Her connection with the *NSN* came about as a result of her meeting with the Russian ballerina Lydia Lopokova, who was married to the Bloomsbury economist John Maynard Keynes, then head of the *NSN* Board of Directors. As Fen put it

⁵⁸ Anton Chekov, *Plays*, trans. and intro. by Elisaveta Fen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959). Elisaveta Fen also translated two collections of Zoshchenko's short stories for Methuen that incorporated her *NSN* translations: Michael Zoshchenko, *The Woman Who Could Not Read and Other Tales*, trans. by Elisaveta Fen (London: Methuen, 1940); and, Michael Zoshchenko, *The Wonderful Dog and Other Tales*, trans. by Elisaveta Fen (London: Methuen, 1942). Methuen's enthusiasm for Russian fiction led to the publication of many other Russian short-story collections, some of which were also translated by Fen. See, for example, *Soviet Stories of the Last Decade*, selected and trans. by Elisaveta Fen (London: Methuen, 1945); and, *Modern Russian Stories*, selected and trans. by Elisaveta Fen (London: Methuen, 1943).

⁵⁹ Leonid Leonov, 'Three tales', *The Calendar of Modern Letters*, 2 (September 1925), pp. 15-33. The main source of information about Elisaveta Fen's life is her autobiography *A Russian's England: Reminiscences of Years 1926-1940* (Warwick: Paul Gordon Books, 1976). There is also a useful short biographical foreword by Maurice Cranston to her *A Russian Childhood* (London: Methuen, 1961).

in her autobiography: 'the chain of events that followed [meeting Lydia], link by link, led me to the place where I am now, and to my becoming known mainly as a translator, rather than a writer in my own right'.⁶¹ After translating Dostoevsky's 'White Night' for Lydia to perform on BBC radio, Lydia thought that the *NSN* would be interested in some of her translations, as Fen recalls: 'At that time, I was casting around for more material for translation, and had come upon the humorous sketches of Mihail Zoshchenko. I translated a few of these, showed them to Lydia Keynes and asked her help in recommending them to the B.B.C. She did not think they were suitable for broadcasting, but suggested I should send them to the editor of the 'New Statesman and Nation', mentioning her name. I did that, and the story was accepted' (p. 337). Her relationship with the *NSN* seems to have been trouble-free and lasted for a couple of years in which the journal, as she says in her autobiography, published everything by Zoshchenko she was able to send them, paying her 3 guineas a story: 'The editor did not refuse any of the stories by Zoshchenko I continued to translate and send them, After a while they did not even trouble to let me know the story was accepted: I merely received the proof, checked it, sent it back and had my cheque at the end of the month' (p. 338). For Fen, it was clear that this enthusiasm for Zoshchenko on the part of the *NSN* was politically motivated, and very much connected with the left intelligentsia's response to Soviet Russia in the 30s. Zoshchenko, she argues, had a real and intrinsic ideological value for the *NSN*:

The people of the 'New Statesman' were delighted to find that a writer was permitted to treat life in the Soviet Union with such an irreverent wit: it justified their refusal to believe the horror stories which were beginning to percolate

⁶⁰ Elisaveta Fen, 'Escape', *New Stories* (August-September 1934), pp. 294-313 (anthologised in O'Brien's *The Best British Short Stories of 1935*); and, 'Monte Estremo', *New Stories* (Aug-Sept. 1935), pp. 258-73 (anthologised in *The Best British Short Stories of 1936*).

⁶¹ Fen, *A Russian's England*, p. 337. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

through the haze of the almost mystical worship the Bolshevik revolution had evoked among West European intellectuals. (p. 338)

Zoshchenko's humour was put in the service of Stalin, and his stories played a crucial role in misrepresenting the reality of the Soviet regime. It gave the impression, Fen argues, that the regime allowed for criticism and dissent. Strangely, Fen doesn't comment on the issue of dating and the disjunction that exists between the production of the short stories in Russia and their publication in Britain. As I have argued earlier, this would certainly have led to Zoshchenko being regarded as a Socialist Realist even though his pieces were actually written in the 20s before the invention of Socialist Realism. It is possible that Fen's general lack of sympathy for the Bolsheviks made her homogenise the post-Revolutionary period and ignore the fact that Party attitudes towards literature changed to the worse after Stalin's assumption of power, and especially after 1928.⁶²

In her own essay on Zoshchenko published in the *NSN* in 1939, Fen herself ignores the Russian description of Zoshchenko as 'the NEP Chekov' (mentioned earlier) and argues that: 'He is a Soviet writer *par excellence*'.⁶³ The fact that the most determining and formative experience for him as a writer was NEP, and the fact that practically no mention is made in his *NSN* short stories to aspects of 30s life in Russia (like the first or second Five Year Plan) is never really addressed by Fen. In fact, she adds to the confusion by using 30s words like 'sabotage' or 'criminal negligence' to describe what some of Zoshchenko's characters are accused of doing though neither word is used by Zoshchenko himself in any of his pieces in the journal. Fen even colludes with the

⁶² For a differentiated and historically sensitive account of Soviet policy towards art and culture see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (London: Cornell University Press, 1992).

⁶³ Elisaveta Fen, 'A Russian Humorist', *NSN*, 22 April 1939, pp. 604-605 (p. 605). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

way the *NSN* is eager to represent Zoshchenko's relationship to Soviet Russia by arguing that he is quintessentially a Russian humorist, coming out of 'an uninterrupted tradition of self-criticism and of laughter at one's own expense' no matter who 'the rulers of Russia' happen to be (p. 604). 'The Russian is well aware of his national defects; he points them out fearlessly; he laughs at them' (p. 604). For Fen, Zoshchenko criticises and 'pokes fun' at the human failings of the Soviet Union not its institutions or ideology:

It is not the institutions but the men who run them that he attacks. Their carelessness, their laziness, their boastfulness and credulity, their tendency to overreach themselves and attempt difficult things before the easier, their lack of thoroughness, and – to compensate for these – an exaggerated formalism which makes ineffectual so many good principles of the Russian administration – examples of all these find place in his stories (p. 605).

Zoshchenko was read as a writer who presented life in the Soviet Union as it really was; he realistically depicted how people were responding and coping with the big 'principles of the Russian administration'. He is seen as being in touch with the people, their concerns and way of living. The weight of the realist tradition, of telling it as it is, is behind him and gives authority to the way he is representing Russia. For the *NSN* in the 30s, Zoshchenko chimed well with its policy of pursuing the 'Truth about Russia'. Interestingly, his late 30s pieces are quite similar in tone, approach, and concerns to the ones published in the early 30s, and I would like to briefly discuss some of the more revealing stories before concluding my discussion of Russian literature in the 30s.

'A Bridegroom' is the first short story to be published in 1938. Uniquely set in the provinces, it tells of the death of a farmer's wife in the middle of the harvest season. No time for mourning or regret here; as the character-narrator says: ' "You know yourselves – harvest season! You're up to your neck in work: you've got to mow, you've got to cart,

you've got to stack. And that was the time, boys, that my woman chose to die"'.⁶⁴ In haste, the farmer looks for and finds a new wife. When he finds out that one of her legs is shorter than the other, he returns her to her village, and thus ends Zoshchenko's take on love and marriage in the Russian provinces.

Such a 'crude' approach to marriage (where the ability to labour is all that counts) is rejected in 'Love', another *NSN* short story. Here the narrator tells his sweetheart that he'd do anything for her because he truly loves her, though he admits that love is apparently an unfashionable sentiment in Russia at the moment: ' "I know that many scientific persons, as well as Communist party members, don't recognise the emotion of love, but I recognise it, Maria Vasilevna" '.⁶⁵ To prove his love he decides to throw himself into the canal. While standing on the railings he gets robbed of all his clothes and is left there naked in the dark. Love is not on the agenda at the end of the piece when he accuses Maria of being the cause of all this: ' "That's what you've done to me," he said at last, giving Mashenka a glance full of hate. "All this because I had to see you home, and now I've got to pay for it with all my belongings. Well ?" '.

But it is really the problems associated with living in communal flats that preoccupy very many of Zoshchenko's pieces of the late 30s. 'The Crisis' is a comical take on the severe housing crisis in Russia. As the narrator-character comments: 'the problem of where to live is not easy to solve. There isn't enough square metres of space to go round because of the housing crisis'.⁶⁶ While looking for a place in Moscow, he meets a comrade who tells him: ' "For three hundred roubles [...] I can fix you up in a

⁶⁴ Michael Zoshchenko, 'A Bridegroom', *NSN*, 12 April 1938, pp. 566-7 (p. 566). Countryside personal relationships are presented as crude in another of Zoshchenko's *NSN* stories, 'A Birthday Treat', 30 December 1930, pp. 954-5, where a farmer leaves his wife behind to walk back home from the market on her birthday so he can give the narrator-townsman a lift on his cart.

bathroom. It's a gentleman's flat. Three lavatories and a bathroom. You can live in the bathroom"'. The narrator moves in. A year later he gets married and settles in with his new wife in the bathroom, which also proves quite handy for bathing their new-born baby a couple of months later. The only inconvenience they had to suffer was when the other residents of the communal flat had to use the bathroom and the family had to be regularly turned out into the passageway. The real crisis develops, however, when the narrator-character's mother-in-law arrives from the provinces and settles down behind the 'marble pillar'. This he finds hard to bear. On knowing that his brother-in-law was also planning to visit, he declares: 'Without waiting for the little brother, I left Moscow. And I'm sending money to my family by post'. The story thus satirises the housing crisis and implicitly criticises Bolshevik policy of moving people from the country into the city and from farming into industry. In an absurd and comic twist of events, the narrator, a country dweller himself, ends up having to leave Moscow for lack of living space, the reverse of what the Party intended.

It is, therefore, quite ironic to find that in another of his short stories Zoshchenko makes the following claim: 'To have your own private flat is, no doubt, a sign of petty bourgeois mentality [...] You ought to live in communal flats. There, everything's public'.⁶⁷ 'Electricity in Common' thus focuses on the 'great deal of discomfort' and 'inconveniences' (p. 202) of living in a communal flat; and it is here that the only mention of the Five Year Plan is made: 'No doubt, when our industry fulfils another Five-Year plan, and when America walks on tip-toe in our presence, then it will be

⁶⁵ Michael Zoshchenko, 'Love', *NSN*, 23 July 1938, pp. 150-51 (p. 151). Next quote is also from p. 151.

⁶⁶ Michael Zoshchenko, 'The Crisis', *NSN*, 3 September 1938, p. 347.

⁶⁷ Michael Zoshchenko, 'Electricity in Common', *NSN*, 11 February 1939, pp. 202-3 (p. 202). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

possible to fix up every tenant with his own electric meter. Or even with two meters each, if necessary. And the meters themselves will keep count of the electricity consumed. Then, life in our tenement flats will become much brighter' (p. 202). The narrator is quite confident that the State recognises the problem and will probably resolve it soon. In the meantime, however, arguments over who spends what and how much still flare up, and tenants continue to monitor each other's electricity consumption: 'Once we had a tenant – a docker – who went off his head on this very subject. He stopped going to bed altogether, and spent his time finding out which tenants read books during the night, and which cooked macaroni in electric saucepans' (202-3). After a period of 'complete demoralisation', when 'No one bothered to turn out lights. Everyone read algebra till midnight. And plugs were stuck into every hole' (p. 203), the tenants refused to pay the bill and the electricity got cut off. This should not, however, be interpreted as a political protest 'against electrification', the narrator hastens to add. He is confident that they will get connected up again anytime soon, and concludes with the following statement: 'But meanwhile, it's nice to have a rest. These large communal families take some effort to run' (p. 203).

'The Stove', another of Zoshchenko's late 30s *NSN* stories, also uses *skaz* and tells of the narrator's argument with the House Committee over his stove, which, he protests, is giving him monoxide poisoning and which they are refusing to repair. To resolve the issue, the Committee decides to sit around the stove and see for themselves if it produces carbon monoxide: ' "If after lighting it we get monoxide poisoning – then it's your luck. We'll have it repaired. But if we don't get poisoned, you must forgive us: it'll

have to be left as it is” ’.⁶⁸ Having done this, the House Committee still decided not to fix the stove, even after the President of the Committee collapses in front of the stove and is rushed off to hospital. He even tells the narrator that the stove is fine: ‘ “No repairs can be made. One can live with that stove all right” ’. The story concludes with the following: ‘Nothing doing. I’m getting used to it. A man’s not like a flea, he can get used to anything’.

Zoshchenko’s ambiguous response to Russia in the 20s is made quite clear in his sketches on ‘communal housing’. He appreciates the progress that is being made, of electrification and housing provision, but makes fun at the way it is being enacted in the private, domestic sphere. His gentle criticism is very significant since it captures the transitoriness of post-Revolutionary Russia, where everything is being made and unmade and social conduct and practice hasn’t yet solidified into social custom, or, as Trotsky put it: ‘Life in Revolution is camp life. Personal life, institutions, methods, ideas, sentiments, everything is unusual, temporary, transitional, recognising its temporariness and expressing this everywhere, even in names’.⁶⁹ Zoshchenko, characteristically, and to his credit, does not provide a grand narrative of Revolution and Socialist construction (an approach rejected by Trotsky as untimely) but snippets and episodes of life under the Revolution. This can mean, however, and, for Trotsky, herein lies the danger, that what is transitory and episodic is also insignificant. Conceived of as such, one can miss ‘the inner meaning of this episodic character’ and what brought it about.

For Trotsky, the Revolution is not only transitory and episodic and fragmented, or, is exactly that but for a purpose: human liberation under communism. There is no

⁶⁸ Michael Zoshchenko, ‘The Stove’, *NSN*, 15 April 1939, p. 572.

⁶⁹ Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 109. Next quotation is also from p. 109.

sense in Zoshchenko that the social flux or movement that he captures episodically in his fiction is more than mere fragment or episode; no sense of an informing force or potential. To repeat what has already been said about his early 30s *NSN* fiction, his work is both impossible without the Revolution and removed from it. Significantly, the same question that Trotsky asked about Pilnyak in *Literature and Revolution* can also be asked about Zoshchenko: 'Does Pilnyak know what is being born from the agonies of Revolution?'.⁷⁰ To read Zoshchenko's fiction is to answer in the negative, since his de-politicised literary populism meant reading and seeing snapshots and fragments rather than social processes.

⁷⁰ Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, p. 115.

5.4 Conclusion: Self-Criticism or Lies?

In 1937, Leon Trotsky published *The Revolution Betrayed*, subtitled *What is the Soviet Union and Where is it Going?* It is regarded by many as his ‘political testament’.⁷¹ Its importance lies in scientifically analysing Soviet culture, politics and society, and showing how they differ and diverge from both Lenin’s Bolshevik Party programme of the early 20s and Marx’s conception of socialism and communism.⁷² Trotsky argues against Stalin’s ‘socialism in one country’ policy (first aired after the catastrophic failure of the 1923 proletarian revolution in Germany) and against Stalin’s declaration in the 30s that socialism had actually been already achieved in the Soviet Union. Addressing the reader, Trotsky says: ‘If you remember that the task of socialism is to create a classless society based upon solidarity and the harmonious satisfaction of all needs, there is not yet, in this fundamental sense, a hint of socialism in the Soviet Union’.⁷³ For Trotsky (Lenin and Marx), the dictatorship of the proletariat provides and safeguards the conditions for the creation of socialist society, but is not yet socialism. How can the Soviet Union which has a lower rate of labour productivity than the least advanced capitalist country be socialist when socialism historically means a higher rate of labour productivity and more advanced productive forces than capitalism, Trotsky wonders? *The Revolution Betrayed* thus provides a detailed critique of the Soviet Union which ranges from economic policy to the re-emergence of prostitution and the re-criminalisation of abortion, and it exposes the betrayal (but not yet overthrow) of the Revolution by the new

⁷¹ Tamara Deutscher, ‘Revolution Betrayed, The’, in *Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, pp. 480-81, p. 480.

⁷² For a detailed exposition and, what the author calls, ‘the fullest reconstruction of Marx’s views of the future available in English’ (p. viii), see Bertell Ollman’s ‘Marx’s Vision of Communism’ in his *Social and Sexual Revolution : Essays on Marx and Reich* (London: Pluto Press, 1979), pp. 48-98. For Lenin’s views see his *State and Revolution* (1917).

⁷³ Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* [RB, hereafter] (London: Faber and Faber, 1937; New York: Pathfinder, 1972), p. 9. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

bureaucratic stratum led by Stalin. The following paragraph, which details the main theses in the book, will briefly convey the crux of Trotsky's analysis (for our purposes):

The Soviet Union is a contradictory society halfway between capitalism and socialism, in which: **(a)** the productive forces are still far from adequate to give the state property a socialist character; **(b)** the tendency toward primitive accumulation created by want breaks out through innumerable pores of the planned economy; **(c)** norms of distribution preserving a bourgeois character lie at the basis of a new differentiation of society; **(d)** the economic growth, while slowly bettering the situation of the toilers, promotes a swift formation of privileged strata; **(e)** exploiting the social antagonisms, a bureaucracy has converted itself into an uncontrolled caste alien to socialism; **(f)** the social revolution, betrayed by the ruling party, still exists in property relations and in the consciousness of the toiling masses; **(g)** a further development of the accumulating contradictions can as well lead to socialism as back to capitalism; **(h)** on the road to capitalism the counter-revolution would have to break the resistance of the workers; **(i)** on the road to socialism the workers would have to overthrow the bureaucracy. In the last analysis, the question will be decided by a struggle of living social forces, both on the national and the world arena. (*RB*, p. 230, emphasis added)

This is Trotsky's own 'truth about Russia'.⁷⁴ It has little in common with Martin, Lloyd, and the *NSN*'s 'truth about Russia'. For Trotsky, Russia has been strangled by bureaucracy, is economically backward and socially conflict ridden, and is still very far away from socialism. The achievements of the Five Year Plan, so much lauded by the *NSN* and its Fabian supporters, were grossly exaggerated, as Trotsky shows in his first section of the book entitled 'What has been Achieved'. Land collectivisation had failed and the 'liquidation of the kulaks' (praised as a measure of advancing civilisation by Lloyd in 1931) was brutal and bloody, causing a famine which, as Roy Medvedev shows in *Let History Judge*, killed around 6 million people in 1931-32.⁷⁵ Though the outside

⁷⁴ In 'Trotsky's Interpretation of Stalinism' (*New Left Review*, (May-June 1983), pp. 49-59), Perry Anderson argues that it is the 'most coherent and developed theorization' of Stalinism in Marxism, and goes on to show its great merits and, inevitably, some of its historical limitations.

⁷⁵ Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origin and Consequences of Stalinism*, ed. and trans. by George Shriver, revised and expanded edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). 'For the Soviet countryside the first five-year plan ended not only with mass collectivisation but also with a terrible famine that took millions of lives' (p. 240). As to the number of deaths: 'To this day no one knows how many peasants died

world didn't know about the famine then, the following statement by Trotsky shows that suppression of news about the event wasn't that total: 'The destruction of people – by hunger, cold, epidemics and measures of repression – is unfortunately less accurately tabulated than the slaughter of stock, but it also mounts up to millions. The blame of these sacrifices lies not upon collectivisation, but upon the blind, violent, gambling methods with which it was carried through' (*RB*, p. 42). In addition, none of the industrial targets set out by the Plan were achieved, and 81% of the tractors (the 'pride of Soviet industry') produced under the Plan needed 'capital repairs' (*RB*, p. 17). The 'shock brigades' (much admired by Lloyd) and the Stakhanovists (their mid-30s equivalent) had a devastating impact on Soviet industry and even managed to decrease rather than increase production (*RB*, p. 82). Furthermore, under what Trotsky called the 'Thermidor in the Family', women lost their right of abortion (the 'most important civil, political, and cultural rights' (*RB*, p. 138)) and, due to the bureaucracy's failure to continue socialising family functions, women were thrown back to 'the old slavery' (*RB*, p. 135). And much else.

How did the *NSN* respond to *The Revolution Betrayed*? Kingsley Martin ignored it. Trotsky's other writings were usually reviewed in the *NSN*, and Martin himself even reviewed Trotsky's 3 volumes of *The History of the Russian Revolution* as they came out and his autobiography *My Life* (1930). It would be absurd to claim that Martin hadn't noticed the publication of the book or that he didn't know what Trotsky's position on the contemporary Soviet Union was; he did, but chose to ignore it, thus suppressing the main

of starvation in 1932-33. Many observers give the figure 5 million; others say 8 million, and the latter is probably closer to the truth' (p. 244). *Let History Judge* is a monumental study of the catastrophe that is Stalinism.

alternative to Stalinism.⁷⁶ This is made abundantly clear by the fact that Martin had even met with Trotsky in Mexico in 1937 and heard from him directly about the real situation in the Soviet Union. Martin's response to such revelations was to write an article in the *NSN* entitled 'Trotsky in Mexico' vilifying him and presenting him as a vain, unreliable, and un-objective person: 'He is a dramatist and plays his own title-roles; I doubt if his judgement had ever been objective'.⁷⁷ Martin had gone to Mexico to hear Trotsky's take on Stalin's purges of the old Bolsheviks and gauge his response to the trial sentencing him to death over accusations of plotting to assassinate Stalin. Though Trotsky tells Martin in no uncertain terms that the trials are a fake, Martin is left unconvinced and says: 'I told him that I was still puzzled by the confessions. They were difficult to explain on any hypothesis' (p. 582). Furthermore, Martin even feels offended by Trotsky's statement that 'in Russia the foreign correspondents were all "paid prostitutes" of Moscow' (p. 582), and he adds: 'He seemed to believe that anyone who had a word to say for Stalin or who hesitates to denounce the whole trial as a frame-up must be in the pay of Moscow. He made an exception in the case of the Webbs – they were merely poor credulous dupes' (p. 582). The real motive behind Martin's trip to Mexico becomes clear when, basing his judgement on mere personal impression and conjecture, he maliciously suggests that Trotsky is very much capable of plotting against Stalin: 'But I came away from our talk rather less inclined to scout the possibility of Trotsky's complicity than I

⁷⁶ When the book was reviewed on the left it was dismissed as a collection of mis-statements, at best, or a pack of lies, at worst, as Margaret Cole's review in *Fact* (September 1937, p. 87-90) demonstrates. In the spirit of 'serious reading of critics as well as apologists' of the Soviet Union (p. 90), Cole accuses Trotsky of treacherously colluding with the Fascists to overthrow Stalin; throws doubt on his notion that the bureaucracy is growing in strength, and makes him out as saying that: 'the Russians were unwise to have had any revolution at all' (p. 89); and all this one presumes is written in the spirit of a fact-finding endeavour. Incidentally, *Fact* also published one short story by Zoshchenko in its 'Writing the Revolt: Theory and Practice' issue: 'The Dictaphone Comes to Soviet Russia', (July 1937), pp. 94-6.

had been before, because his judgement appeared to me so unstable, and therefore the possibility of his embarking on a crazy plot more credible' (p. 582). In 'Trotsky in Mexico', Martin seeks to eliminate Trotsky as a source or bearer of truth. Martin's personal impression is politically motivated and functions to safeguard the legitimacy of Stalin, his tactics of eliminating potential political rivals, and his strategy of silencing dissent.

Discrediting dissent or ignoring anti-Stalinist arguments or positions is also a strategy Martin adopts with George Orwell. When (also in 1937) Orwell sent the *NSN* his article detailing the way in which Stalin was attacking and suppressing political parties (like the anarchist POUM) on the republican side, Martin refused to publish it on the grounds that it was against, as Martin puts it, 'political policy' (much larger than the trifle of 'editorial' policy one imagines).⁷⁸ If Martin innocently thought he was defending the Popular Front against Fascism from collapse or loss of morale, he was seriously misguided and politically naïve. It was in fact Stalin who was damaging the Popular Front and weakening it. Orwell, like Trotsky, was trying to lift the veil off Stalin's Russia and expose the way in which it subjected the Communist International to its own will and its reactionary, counter-revolutionary political interests.⁷⁹ Martin disbelieved, maybe, but he certainly ignored and turned the other way, missing an opportunity to expose Spain as a 'microcosm of Stalinism' abroad, in Cunningham's phrase.⁸⁰ From our perspective today it might seem like a small incident but for people at the time it looked and felt like gross political distortion. As one of Martin's correspondents quoted in Rolph's biography

⁷⁷ Kingsley Martin, 'Trotsky in Mexico', *NSN*, 10 April 1937, pp. 581-2 (p. 581). Further references are given quotations in the text.

⁷⁸ Episode relayed in C. H. Rolph, *Kingsley: The Life, Letters and Diaries of Kingsley Martin* (London: Gollancz, 1973), pp. 225-7 (p. 226).

puts it: Martin's refusal to publish was ' "largely instrumental in misleading a whole generation of socialists into a false assessment of the real nature of Soviet despotism" ' .⁸¹

In the name of the Popular Front, Martin continued to advance what amounted to a Stalinist agenda in the *NSN*, even when he knew the real 'truth about Russia'. On the contrary, when Stalin's policies were being increasingly exposed and attacked by the likes of Trotsky and Orwell, Martin attempted to consolidate his Popular Front policy and ideological allegiance to Stalin by looking towards the literary section for solutions and reintroducing to it the work of Michael Zoshchenko in the late 30s. Elisaveta Fen's translations were thus instrumental in counterbalancing and countering the bad press that Stalin was getting in the late 30s. By publishing Zoshchenko extensively, Martin seemed to be telling the readers of the *NSN* that if Zoshchenko can still complain, 'poke fun' at, and criticise, then surely things aren't as bad as Stalin's critics make them out to be.⁸²

Zoshchenko's political importance to the *NSN* can be said to revolve around a phrase that was used a lot by Stalin and 'Friends of the Soviet Union': 'self-criticism'; the notion that 'self-criticism' was an intrinsic part of life in Stalin's Russia. It was used, for example, in another of the *NSN*'s Soviet ventures: the much debated and commented on 'Stalin–Wells Talk', where Stalin responds to Wells's challenge about 'free expression of opinion – even of opposition opinion' by saying: 'We Bolsheviks call it

⁷⁹ On Soviet foreign policy see Trotsky, *Revolution Betrayed*, pp.170–77.

⁸⁰ Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, p. 427.

⁸¹ Rolph, *Kingsley*, p. 229.

⁸² In 1946, during 'the Soviet Literary Controversy' surrounding the expulsion by Zhdanov of Zoshchenko and Anna Akhmatova from the Soviet Writers' Union for 'preaching rotten rubbish, devoid of ideas, trivially commonplace, and apolitical, aimed at disorienting our youth and poisoning their minds' (*Central Committee Resolution and Zhdanov's Speech on the Journals Zvezda and Leningrad* (Royal Oak :Strathcona Publishing, 1978), p. 41), Martin (as Critic) described Zoshchenko's 30s *NSN* stories as 'the best proof possible that humour and self-criticism survive in the U.S.S.R.' ('A London Diary', *NSN*, 7 September 1946, p. 165). Another entry by Critic, this time in 1947, states: 'For many years he was the Soviet's best advertisement, proving, it seemed, that the Russian authorities were not the intolerant, humourless fanatics they were supposed to be' ('A London Diary', *NSN*, 12 April 1947, p. 249).

“self-criticism”. It is widely used in the U.S.S.R.’.⁸³ The phrase is also much used by Sidney and Beatrice Webb in their *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* (1935), as Trotsky comments: ‘The Webbs swear, for example, that criticism in the Soviet Union is completely free. A sense of humor is not to expected of these people. They refer with complete seriousness to that notorious “self-criticism” which is enacted as a part of one’s official duties, and the direction of which, as well as its limits, can always be accurately foretold’ (*RB*, p. 274). In fact, the Webbs dedicate a whole section in their book to ‘The Practice of Self-Criticism’, which, they argue, permeates all levels of Soviet society and is unique in the world to the Soviet Union. Stalin, apparently, was the one who spearheaded this drive towards ‘outspoken criticism’, and the Webbs accordingly provide a lengthy quote from his Party Congress speech of 1933 in order to convey the centrality of this activity to Party ideology and policy:

‘First the Party developed wide *self-criticism* concentrating the attention of the masses on the defects in our work of construction, the defects in our organisations and institutions. [...] Condemning the Trotskyists criticism, which came from the other side of the barricades, and was intended to discredit and weaken the Soviet Government, the Party proclaimed the task of self-criticism to be the merciless exposure of the weaknesses in our work in order to *improve* our construction and *strengthen* the Soviet Government. It is well known that the call of the Party aroused the most lively response amongst the masses of the working class and the peasantry’.⁸⁴

Needless to say, it is the Party (i.e. Stalin) who has the power and ability to distinguish between damaging ‘Trotskyist criticism’ and healthy ‘self-criticism’. Or, to put it another way, only the Party knew when ‘self-criticism’ degenerated into ‘Trotskyist criticism’.

⁸³ The ‘Stalin-Wells Talk’ was published in the *NSN* on 27 October 1934. I am quoting from the *NSN* collection which included this ‘Talk’ and responses to it by George Bernard Shaw, John Maynard Keynes and Ernest Toller, and some others, *Stalin-Wells Talk: The Verbatim Record and A Discussion* (London: The New Statesman and Nation, 1934), p. 18.

⁸⁴ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation*, 2nd edition (London; Victor Gollancz, 1937), p. 774. This second edition dropped the question mark which appeared at the end of the

‘Self-criticism’ was in practice a good way of eliminating enemies of the Party and a useful tool for repression by the bureaucracy.

For Trotsky, *Soviet Communism* is a ‘depressing book, which rehashes the reports of Moscow bureaus and the anniversary article of the Moscow Press’ (*RB*, p. 272). It uncritically reproduces the bureaucracy’s own view of the Soviet Union and completely ignores what was undoubtedly the most significant post-revolutionary development of all, the rise of the bureaucracy itself: ‘the Webbs never once mentioned the Soviet bureaucracy as a social category. And no wonder, for they wrote, in the essence of the matter, under its dictation!’ (p. 126). Needless to say, such concerns were not addressed in Louis Fischer’s *NSN* review of *Soviet Communism*: ‘In fact, I know of no book in any language which offers so inclusive and therefore realistic a view of the functioning of Soviet society’.⁸⁵ The *NSN*’s ‘truth about Russia’, like Fischer’s, the Webbs’s, Martin’s and Lloyd’s, amounted to a lie, or, what Trotsky in one of his more generous moods called: ‘*Bolshevism for the Cultured Bourgeoisie*, or more concisely, *Socialism for Radical Tourists*’ (*RB*, p. 8, original italics). If, as Trotsky concludes his *The Revolution Betrayed*, ‘The motor force of progress is truth and not lies’ (*RB*, p. 277), then it can safely be concluded that the *NSN* played a regressive political role in its reporting on the Soviet Union in the 30s and missed a great opportunity in uncovering the real historical truth about Stalinism.

subtitle in the first edition. The Webbs were by this time convinced that they had found a ‘New Civilisation’.

⁸⁵ Beatrice and Sidney Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?*, rev. by Louis Fischer, *NSN*, 7 December 1935, pp. 895-6 (p. 895). To be fair, the Webbs add a page on Soviet bureaucracy in their ‘Postscript’ to the 2nd edition (not the edition that Trotsky had read), where they argue that the increasing criticism of Soviet bureaucracy ‘comes to no more than the average sensual man’s impatience of the unavoidable apparatus of any highly developed industrial community’, though ‘collectives do well to overhaul, from time to time, the social apparatus they are driven to construct’ (p. 1212).

Chapter 6

Plurality of Copies or Individuals: 30s English Fiction

6.1 Introduction

More women writers were published in the *NS* in the 30s than in the 20s. This is true of both poetry and fiction. The number of poems by women published in the 30s is proportionally double that published in the 20s (16% to 8%); significantly, the latter is itself double the percentage of poems published under J. C. Squire in 1913-1919. Thus, in the whole period from 1913 to 1939, women's poetry doubles its percentage in the *NS* nearly every decade. Fiction by women has a different historical pattern. Though there is more than double the percentage of fiction by women in the 30s than the in 20s (19% to 7.5%), this significant rise is merely a return to an earlier similar average percentage-rate achieved under Squire. So, if the story of women's poetry in the *NS* from 1913 to 1939 is that of gradually increasing representation, the record of women's fiction in the 30s is rather a restitution to an earlier, better (but still degraded) status.¹

The period between MacCarthy's departure and David Garnett's arrival as literary editor in late 1931 saw some editorial instability in the literary section if not in the journal as a whole. This period is seen by both historians of the *NS* (Edward Hyams and Adrian Smith) as one of editorial confusion and of decline, which resulted in the sacking of

¹ One reason for this 'discrepancy' between the patterns of poetry and fiction in the 20s may be that MacCarthy, whose views on women's intellectual status have been outlined earlier, was only responsible for selecting the short stories for publication, while his assistant G. W. Stonier was in charge of the poetry contributions. As I argued earlier, Stonier's increasing control over the literary section from the late 20s (becoming *de facto* editor) could explain the increasing presence of short stories by women in the literary section.

Clifford Sharp and the appointment of Kingsley Martin to the editorial chair as part of the merger of the *NS* with its old Liberal rival *The Nation*. This didn't only bring back stability to the journal but also created the necessary institutional conditions for the *NS* to flourish and become a national Left institution with unprecedented circulation and sales.² Before his departure, however, Sharp, very surprisingly, appointed his old drinking partner Clennell Wilkinson as literary editor for a period of six months on the promise that he would bring in weekly contributions from his uncle Hilaire Belloc.³ Once Belloc's contributions started dwindling, Wilkinson was swiftly replaced by R. Ellis Roberts at the end of 1930, whom Martin inherited as literary editor, couldn't get along with and later on sacked.

One welcome result of the editorial instability that led to Wilkinson's and Ellis Roberts's appointments, though, was the dramatic rise in the number of contributions by women under their reigns. In 1930, for example, under Wilkinson, 36% of fiction and 30% of poetry published in the journal were by women, a between two-to-three fold increase on the total average percentage for the period from 1913 to 1939 as a whole. Out of 22 short stories published in 1930, 8 were by 7 different women: Jan Struther, Malachi Whitaker, Kay Kershaw, Margaret Gere, Naomi Mitchison, Jessica Ware, and Ethel

² After its merger with the *Nation*, the *NS* had as regular contributors Britain's biggest economists and political commentators, such as: John Maynard Keynes, G. D. H. Cole, J. A. Hobson, Leonard Woolf, H. N. Brailsford, Harold Laski, and R. H. S. Crossman. Regarding sales figures, the pre-merger *NS* sold around 10,000 copies a week; under Martin in the 30s average sales started at around 15,000 in 1932 and rose up to 29,000 in 1939. The *NSN* also incorporated the *Week-end Review* in 1934, which brought an average increase in sales of around 6000 copies. The real break for the *NSN* came during the wartime period when sales went up to 70,000 (in 1944). See Edward Hyams, *The New Statesman: The History of the First Fifty Years 1913-1963* (London: Longmans, 1963), p. 122, p. 184, p. 227, p. 238.

³ For more details see, Hyams, *The New Statesman*, 160-63; Adrian Smith, *The New Statesman: Portrait of a Political Weekly 1913-1931* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), p. 186-7. Wilkinson's journalistic experience included being Assistant Editor of the *Egyptian Gazette* (1908) in Alexandria, Editor of *Land and Water* (1919), and Literary Editor of *The Outlook* (1921). For more information see his *Who's Who* entry (CD Rom version).

Colburn Mayne.⁴ Here the diversity of narrative technique is quite pronounced, ranging from Mitchison's historical-realist narrative (set in ancient Rome), to Whitaker, Ware, Struther, and Colburn Mayne's day-to-day realism, and, finally, to Gere and Kershaw's impressionism and inclination towards modernist narration.⁵ The themes of the short stories are wide-ranging as well, from the practice of ancient slave buying (Mitchison), to children (Gere and Kershaw), and to the disappointments of shattered myth (Ware and Whitaker).

Colburn Mayne's 'Ugliness', however, is arguably the most striking of the lot, combining a malicious representation of the working class with a bourgeois isolationism.⁶ Included in Edward J. O'Brien's selection of *The Best Short Stories of 1931*, 'Ugliness' crystallises a set of middle class attitudes towards the working class which stands in complete contrast to H. E. Bates and V. S. Pritchett's working-class portraits in the 30s, to

⁴ Jan Struther, 'A Balkan Journey', *NS*, 1 February 1930, pp. 499-500 [a travel account, strictly speaking]; Malachi Whitaker, 'The Comedian', *NS*, 15 March 1930, pp. ix-xx; Kay Kershaw, 'Shadows Before', *NS*, 12 April 1930, pp. 13-4; Margaret Gere, 'Wynlayne', *NS*, 19 April 1930, pp. 48-9; Naomi Mitchison, 'Buying a Secretary', *NS*, 7 June 1930, pp. 274-5; Jessica Ware, 'The London Train', *NS*, 5 July 1930 (p. 411); Ethel Colburn Mayne, 'Ugliness', *NS*, 27 September 1930, pp. 761-2; Jan Struther, 'Engelsch En Een Week', *NS*, 4 October 1930, p. 794.

⁵ Little is known about Kershaw or Ware. Struther is well known for her *Mrs Miniver* (1939). Malachi Whitaker (from Yorkshire) is another one of Edward Garnett's finds at Jonathan Cape (see his *Capajon*), where she published *Frost in April* (1929). For little known artist Margaret Gere, who was a member of both the Birmingham Group of Artist-Craftsmen and of the Cotswold Group, see Gaynor Andrews and George Breeze, *Margaret Gere 1878-1965* (Cheltenham: Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museums, 1984). Virginia Woolf's diary reveals her great admiration for Gere's 'superior still lives' (p. 6). The 'Introduction' to the catalogue also makes clear that R. Ellis Roberts helped Gere publish her short stories (p. 10), and was most probably responsible for bringing her work to the *NS*. For Ethel Colburn Mayne see note 6.

⁶ Colburn Mayne published her first short story (as 'Frances E. Huntly') in John Lane's *Yellow Book* in 1895. She reviewed fiction for the *Nation* and her books include novels (such as *Jessie Vandeleur* (London: George Allen, 1902; *One of Our Grandmothers* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1916)); many collections of short stories (such as *Inner Circle* (London: Constable, 1925) and *Blindman* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1919); literary criticism (*Browning's Heroines* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1913) and *Byron*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1924)); and some translations from German (*Kaiser Wilhelm II*, by Emil Ludwig (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1926) and *Letters of Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky to His Family and Friends*, trans. by Alexander Eliasberg (London: Chatto & Windus, 1914)). One of her short stories is mentioned in Nicola Beauman, *A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel* (London: Virago, 1983), p. 159. For more information about her life see her *Who's Who* entry (CD Rom version) and an entry in

which I will return.⁷ Colburn Mayne's title, 'Ugliness', in fact refers to the working class, the 'gaudy masses', the streaming 'multitudes' and their 'people's graves', which the middle-class family in the story, in an act of class hatred and snobbery, especially resents.⁸ Having paid a large sum of money for an exclusive plot of land in a London cemetery, appropriately distant and 'secluded from the crowd' and 'quiet' (p. 762), they are shocked to find a year later that the surrounding plots had started to be 'invaded' by the 'masses':

Instead of seclusion, now there were people, people, people – children crying, children sucking sweets and oranges, while their elders heaped more flowers on the heaped mounds that looked like skeleton backbones when one could see them, as if there wasn't enough earth to go round [...] The thing, of course, grew worse and worse; a few months later the invasion was a deluge'. (p. 762)

The narrator, who seems to endorse such an attitude, also adds: 'Never before had there been so much ugliness, so little quietude' (p. 762). After an angry exchange of looks with a girl standing over a neighbouring grave, the family 'fled the place – the submerged tree and silenced birds, the bunches of watering-cans, the "Mumsies," "Darling little Ernies," "Sweet little Babsies," the pink tin crosses, flabby parrot tulips ... all the ugliness' (p. 762).

'Ugliness' is about the failure of exclusion, isolation, and quietude, and a deep sense of crisis as a result. In a decade characterised by the pressure on bourgeois writers

Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature, ed. by Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1942).

⁷ Ethel Colburn Mayne, 'Ugliness', in *The Best Short Stories of 1931: I English*, ed. by Edward J. O'Brien (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931), pp. 163-68. For similar middle-class attitudes towards the 'masses' see John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).

⁸ Ethel Colburn Mayne, 'Ugliness', *NS*, 27 September 1930, pp. 761-2. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

to 'go over' to the side of the working class,⁹ Colburn Mayne's 'Ugliness' is a useful reminder of the existence of an opposite, regressive reaction and sense of encroachment, a world where even money can't guarantee that much sought after 'illusion of a country churchyard' (p. 761).

The illusion of seclusion takes a different (more individual and psychological) form in Stella Benson's 30s fiction in the *NS*, where an alienated preoccupation with the bourgeois self dominates. Introduced to the *NS* by her friend R. Ellis Roberts in 1931, Benson is very significant both because she has the largest number of contributions to the journal by any one woman writer in the 30s and because she is a modernist whose work is published in a journal in which the dominant fictive mode throughout the period from 1913 to 1939 is realist.

⁹ See 'Going Over' in Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), pp. 211-40.

6.2 Stella Benson's Mirrors

Stella Benson is one of those many interwar writers whose work has been neglected by contemporary criticism.¹⁰ When she died in 1933, posters went up in Leicester Square announcing 'Death of a noted Novelist', as Virginia Woolf mournfully notes in her diary on 7 December 1933.¹¹ Her work was greatly appreciated by many women writers at the time including Naomi Mitchison and Winifred Holtby.¹² Rebecca West was very enthusiastic about Benson's first novel *I Pose* (1915) and wrote to her saying: 'How lucky you are to have written the only novel of genius about the suffrage'.¹³

Her fiction was widely recognised for its originality, and in 1932 she won the Femina Vie Heureuse Prize for her story about a White Russian community in Manchuria, *Tobit Transplanted* (1931); Woolf had earlier won for *To the Lighthouse* (1927) when Benson and Storm Jameson were short-listed for their, respectively,

¹⁰ A recent exception is Anthea Trodd, *Women's Writing in English: Britain 1900-1945* (London: Longmans, 1998). The only book-length study is American: R. Meredith Bedell, *Stella Benson* (Boston: Twayne, 1983). There are two biographies of Benson: R. Ellis Roberts, *Portrait of Stella Benson* (London: Macmillan, 1939), and Joy Grant, *Stella Benson* (London: Macmillan, 1987). More succinct biographical information can be found in Benson's *Who's Who* entry (CD Rom version); her *DNB* (CD Rom version) by Georgina Battiscombe; an entry in Kunitz and Haycraft (eds.) *Twentieth Century Authors*, pp. 123-5; and, more recently, Gill Plain, 'Stella Benson', in *Dictionary of British Women Writers*, ed. by Janet Todd (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 58-60. For a more contemporary portrait see Doris Estcourt, 'Stella Benson', *The Bookman*, May 1932, pp. 103-104. Some interesting early assessments are: R. Brimley Johnson, *Some Contemporary Novelists (Women)* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1920), pp. 163-74; Geoffrey Wells, 'The Scepticism of Stella Benson', *The Adelphi*, June 1924, pp. 50-60; and, finally, Geoffrey West, 'Foreword', in *Christmas Formula and Other Stories*, by Stella Benson (London: W. Jackson, 1932), pp. 7-17.

¹¹ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf 1931-1935*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell, 6 vols (London: Penguin, 1982), IV, p. 192.

¹² See 'Stella Far Off' in Naomi Mitchison, *You May Well Ask: A Memoir 1920-1940* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1979), pp. 127-37. In addressing the issue of the current neglect of Benson's work, Mitchison very oddly says: 'I keep wondering what would be thought of her now, almost all her books have an element of fantasy, sometimes straight magic [...] It's the touch of what one must call whimsy that would I suggest make her work unacceptable now' (p. 129). This is certainly not a sufficient reason for the complete neglect that Benson has suffered at the hands of the critical and publishing establishments. David Garnett uses fantasy as well, yet his novels have been reissued several times and are still in print, as the cases of *Lady Into Fox* and *A Man in the Zoo* show (Chatto & Windus, 1960; Hogarth Press, 1985; Vintage, 2000). So does Sylvia Townsend Warner, yet *Lolly Willowes: or, The Loving Huntsman* (1926) was reissued by The Women's Press in 1978.

¹³ Quoted in Grant, *Stella Benson*, p. 83.

Goodbye, Stranger (1926) and *The Lovely Ship* (1927). Benson spent much of her life abroad, and foreign parts feature very strongly in many of her novels: the West Indies in *I Pose* (1915), California in *The Poor Man* (1922), and the Far East in *Tobit Transplanted* (1931). Before marrying J. C. O’Gorman Anderson (of the Chinese Customs Service) and leaving again for China in 1922, she worked for a year or two in various suffrage organisations (like the Women Writers Suffrage League and the United Suffragists) and did some work for the Charity Organisation Society in East London.¹⁴ She spent many years in China, and from there she sent back many articles and travel sketches for the *Star*, *Nation and Athenaeum*, and *The Bookman*, some of which were collected in, for example, *The Little World* (1925).

Benson’s first prose piece in the *NSN* is a striking meditation on the fragmentation of self and loss of original selfhood. ‘Reflections in a Mirror’ is obsessed with the proliferation of substitutes in a world of no originals. The ‘reflections’ of the title refer to both the narrator’s thoughts and speculations and to her actual mechanical replicas in the mirror. Benson’s piece, however, is not a celebration of multiplicity but an angst-ridden, philosophical mourning of loss, as the narrator states: ‘Once in a Cambodian palace, and once again (I think) at Wembley, I met an infinite number of myselfs in a room panelled with mirrors [...] This army of myselfs seemed to me at first a challenge, and then an attack –almost a lynching’.¹⁵ Though the narrator had always been aware that ‘Imitations [...] stand always ready to lynch the original; substitutes seek realities in order to murder them; words assemble like vultures to devour thought’ (p. 577), she never thought that

¹⁴ O’Gorman Anderson’s two sons are Benedict and Perry Anderson. He was married to Benson until her death in 1933 and then married their mother. His story, and that of the imperial outpost he worked in, are told by Perry Anderson in a two-part series entitled ‘A Belated Encounter’, *The London Review of Books*, 30 July 1998, pp. 3-10 and 20 August 1998, pp. 28-34.

one day even her self would be subject to this threat: 'But in myself I thought I contained the only indisputable reality' (p. 577-8).

Feeling lynched by replicas, substitutes, imitations, she looks hard for something to cling on to, something by which to distinguish her real self from 'this rabble of myselfes'. Do 'teeth', 'bones' or 'inspiration' distinguish the original from 'this menacing majority of false myselfes?' Maybe not. Her doubts about 'this dangerous, pretentious crowd', thus, persist: 'were they – even boneless as they were – perhaps more me than I was?' Could 'bones' and 'inspiration' mark off the original from its substitutes; after all: 'Their impulse had depended on my inspiration, expressed by my bones, plus a reflecting machine called a mirror [...] I was the original, they the substitutes; I was the music, they the gramophone records'. But isn't music a substitute as well, a replica of an original, the narrator thoughtfully asks: 'Music, in calling itself an expression, admits itself a substitute – the way, but not the life'. By following her own logic through the narrator reaches the (deconstructionist) conclusion that everything is a substitute for everything else, and, subsequently, that substitutes are in fact the real realities of life, copies the originals:

Music is a substitute for thought, thought for understanding, understanding for peace; crossword puzzles are substitutes for books, books for knowledge, knowledge for divinity [...] Where were my bones now? I thought, for each in each of these series of substitutes that streamed into my mind, it was the *copy* that contained the crude bone – the thing copied was the unproven thing, the intangible illusion – peace, divinity, eternity – these bodiless originals are the realities which our poor, creaking, bony substitutes labour in vain to embody. Bones, then, are substitutes for souls

Her sense of 'solidity' is lost, 'in a world of mirrored myselfes' there can no longer be a sense of fixity.

¹⁵ Stella Benson, 'Reflections in a Mirror', *NSN*, 13 June 1931, pp. 577-8 (p. 577). Unless otherwise

The crisis of self, represented by Benson here, is in fact a feature of 30s fiction, described by Peter Widdowson in terms of a crisis of 'individualist ideology': 'The explicit concern with "consciousness", the turning-inward to the displaced perception of the world in the register of individual minds is, both in literary and ideological terms, a kind of recognition of the embattlement of liberal-bourgeois individualism'.¹⁶ Benson's embattled individuality, her struggle with imitations and substitutes, leads her to conclude that individuality and selfhood are unreal in a world where replicas rule, a sentiment with which she concludes her meditation: 'For, even as I write this, I can hear the gramophone next door gargling a thin tenor sound, a substitute for the voice that used to come from the throat of Caruso, whose reality "is dust"'. It is the replica which is real.

Very interestingly, Benson relates this loss of the original to technology and new forms of mechanical reproduction (whether visual or musical), a loss that is also described using metaphors of the many and is experienced in places like Wembley: 'dangerous, pretentious crowd', 'crowd of myselfes', 'army of myselfes', 'massed' (p. 577). This dual theme of technology and masses also appears in the work of one of Benson's European contemporaries, Walter Benjamin. In his seminal essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), Benjamin argues that as a result of new technological developments in the sphere of mechanical reproduction (like photography, film, and 'the technical reproduction of sound') the work of art has lost its 'authority' and sense of 'authenticity', its 'aura'

This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalise by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it

indicated, all quotations are from p. 578.

¹⁶ Peter Widdowson, 'Between the Acts? English Fiction in the Thirties', in *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties*, ed. by Jon Clark, et al., (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), pp. 133-64 (p. 134).

substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence [...] Both processes are intimately connected with the contemporary mass movements.¹⁷

For Benjamin, contemporary art has as a result lost its ‘uniqueness and permanence’ for a ‘transitoriness and reproducibility’, with the form of art itself also being affected: ‘To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility’.¹⁸ The work of art is thus not only *massified* in its reception but in its processes of production as well. What Benjamin calls ‘the contemporary decay of the aura’ has, he argues, ‘social bases’, ‘which are related to the increasing significance of the masses in contemporary life’.

Perry Anderson has explored the ‘social bases’ of what has retrospectively been designated as ‘modernism’. In his review of Marshall Berman's *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (1983), Anderson argues that ‘modernism’, as a set of aesthetic practices and crisis in bourgeois culture, can only be understood as ‘the product of a particular historical conjuncture’:

European modernism in the first years of this century thus flowered in the space between a still usable classical past, a still indeterminate technical present, and a still unpredictable political future. Or, put another way, it arose at the intersection between a semi-aristocratic ruling order, a semi-industrialised capitalist economy, and a semi-emergent, or – insurgent, labour movement.¹⁹

Following Benjamin, Anderson identifies the emergence of new technologies of the second industrial revolution and the increasing political significance of the working class

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt and trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), pp. 211-44 (p. 215), emphasis added.

¹⁸ Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art’, p. 216, p. 218. Next quotations is from p. 216.

¹⁹ Perry Anderson, ‘Marshall Berman: Modernity and Revolution’, in *A Zone of Engagement* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 25-55, (p. 51, p. 36). This essay includes both Anderson's original review piece, first published in *New Left Review* 144 (March-April 1984), and an additional ‘Postscript’ where Anderson responds to Berman's own reply in ‘The Signs in the Street: A Reply to Perry Anderson’. Berman's reply also appeared in *NLR* 144 and has recently been reprinted in his *Adventures in Marxism* (London: Verso, 2000).

as crucial factors for understanding the cultural phenomenon of modernism, adding to them the third factor of the existence of a 'highly formalised academicism' resulting from the aristocratic dominance of culture.²⁰ This set of conditions determined (put pressure on) the cultural sphere and resulted in a crisis in a 'whole traditional ideology of representation'.²¹ As Terry Eagleton argues in his 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', the modernist artefact resists commodity culture (massification and commodification) and attempts to preserve the illusion of the 'autonomy of art' by becoming obscure, self-referential, and by resisting interpretation:

Modernism is among other things a strategy whereby the work of art resists commodification, holds out by the skin of its teeth against those social forces which would degrade it to an exchangeable object [...] To fend off such reduction to commodity status, the modernist work brackets off the referent or real historical world, thickens its textures and deranges its forms to forestall instant consumability, and draws its own language protectively around it to become a mysteriously autotelic object, free of all contaminating truck with the real.

In their different ways, Benjamin and Benson are expressing and responding to the crisis of modernism, though Benjamin is alone in celebrating the liberation of art from the aura and in seeing the democratic potentialities of the new technologies. Both are drawing attention to the same historical conjuncture: the rise of the masses, mass culture, mass society, and the technological forms of reproduction that accompanied it. This brought with it Benson's 'lynching of myself by myself', Benjamin's 'decay of the aura', and Widdowson's 'embattlement of liberal-bourgeois individualism'. Under such material and ideological pressures, the 'uniqueness and permanence' (to use Benjamin's phrase) of both bourgeois individuality and bourgeois art were challenged

²⁰ Anderson, 'Marshall Berman', p. 34.

²¹ Terry Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', *NLR* 152 (July-August 1985), pp. 60-73. Next quotation is from p. 67.

and put into question, leading Benson to the modernist realisation that ‘bodiless originals are the realities’.

The inward-turn and concern with the self characteristic of modernist fiction – exemplified in the 30s by Woolf’s meditation on bourgeois selfhood in *The Waves* (1931) – is also present in Benson’s other *NSN* fiction. ‘More Dreams’, for example, broaches the issue of dreams and identity by using the new film-inspired language of ‘scenes’ and ‘lenses’. The narrator, in an essayistic, exploratory style, describes dreams as ‘a clear moving picture framed in a circle, hazy at the edges like the field of view of a telescope’.²² Her dreams are ‘extremely vivid and accurate’, ‘impersonal’, ‘consistent’, and have ‘every mark of authenticity – except the fact of being true’ (p. 576). She has two types of dreams. One is the ‘ordinary everynight dream’ which ‘leads nowhere at all’ and is ‘an explosion of the fancy – a dazzle of inconsistencies, improbabilities, inconsequences, and oddities of emphasis’. In the other, ‘rarer dreams’ there is ‘a remote and utterly different air from that wind that blows hot and cold through a common dream; the light is an indirect and moon-clear light – the light of no-identity’. She finds ‘the complete shedding of personality’ that these dreams demand ‘a most intoxicating delight’, and goes on to give lengthy accounts of two such dreams. These dreams are, she concludes:

unfinished, unbegun, fragments of nothing projected on to nothingness. They had no importance, but they had to me the intense significance of things seen in childhood [...] Such [childhood] images are things in themselves; they call for no explanation. And I believe my impersonal middle-aged bones build up these dreams to protect themselves from the endless weariness of identity and personal experience. (p. 577)

²² Stella Benson, ‘More Dreams’, *NSN*, 12 November 1932, pp. 576–7 (p. 576). Unless otherwise indicated in, all quotations are from page 576.

Benson finds these dreams of no-identity deeply satisfying. Where earlier, in 'Reflections in the Mirror', her identity and sense of individuality are thrown into question, here she simply sidelines the struggle between 'myself' and 'the army of myselfs'. Exhausted by 'the endless weariness of identity and personal experience', by the struggle of being a separate and original self, she finds a haven in dreams, where things *are* what they look and exist without need for explanation or signification. In dreams there is no crisis of representation, no gap between imitations and originals, words and thoughts, realities and substitutes. Such a world of 'things in themselves' is also, for Benson, the lost world of childhood, a place which can only be delightfully retrieved in dreams.

It is this world that is the focus of another one of Benson's short stories, 'Wild Pygmies Afloat', memorably anthologised in V. S. Pritchett's selection from the *NSN* called *Turnstile One*.²³ In this short story Benson follows her own advice in 'To a Budding Novelist', where she states that contemporary writers should represent 'other people' as (again) 'things in themselves, creatures looking out of their own eyes' and not as they 'ought' to be.²⁴ Interestingly, Benson again employs the phrase *things in themselves*, which she had used in 'More Dreams' to describe the childhood way of seeing things that she sometimes experiences in her dreams. For her, then, things in fiction should be represented as they would appear in childhood: writers should write with a child's eye. It is essential, she argues, that writers of today adopt this literary strategy (or philosophy) simply because there are no 'common standards' to allow for the

²³ *Turnstile One: A Literary Miscellany from The New Statesman and Nation*, ed. by V. S. Pritchett (London: Turnstile Press, 1948), pp. 212-8. Pritchett includes Benson's story under the heading of 'Essays and Reviews', probably because of its essayistic qualities, though it can equally be seen as a piece of fiction.

²⁴ Stella Benson, 'To a Budding Novelist', *NSN*, 20 May 1933, pp. 629-30 (p. 629). Subsequent quotations are all from p. 630.

‘ought’ of life and fiction to be active or relevant, as she tells her young novelist-correspondent:

But when you begin to write about those odd unknown monsters –*other people*– remember that the word *ought* is only a word made of air, implying some accepted standard that you and all other selves have in common. There is no such common standard, believe me; there is no relation between words and bones; there is no lesson that you can teach the bone. You can only, as a novelist, record the obscure, incredible movements of the bones. You can see bones through a fog that never lifts. (original emphasis)

In the foggy world of individual standards, a writer can only record the movements of the bones, the way *other people* are and not how they ought to be. ‘To a Budding Novelist’ is significant because it brings together Stella Benson’s ideas about writing and how (paradoxically) a modern writer *ought* to look at the world. What it shows is that Benson wants (and struggles) to describe other people while accepting that they can never be fully understood and, so, can never be judged. She is certainly non-solipsistic in her emphasis that there are things other than one’s self to be described, as ‘Wild Pygmies Afloat’ shows.

Here, children are the wild pygmies of the title, and it is their world that the narrator tries to fathom: ‘Too often observers in that icy world of the very young wrap their perceptions in wrappings of patronising tolerance [...] Too rarely does a dispassionate and respectful explorer eavesdrop in the jungle thoroughfares of that far world’.²⁵ Their world is different, ‘alien’, ‘conspicuously homogeneous, although our ship was a cosmopolitan one’, and the children speak ‘a fundamentally different language’ (p. 160). Hierarchies exist, and it is the girls, the ‘elect’, who ‘were the aristocrats and bullies’ (p. 160). The narrator is less interested, however, in the ‘moral

superiority' and 'superior rightness' of the elect than in the 'immoral ingenuity' of the two 'brigands', the Armenian and French boys whom she describes as 'self-made human beings' (p. 161). Through her 'scientific eavesdropping' (p. 161) techniques, she observes their comings and goings. When one day the French boy forces the 800-passenger ship to stop, turn around, and start looking for a person he claimed he saw drowning in the sea, the narrator smells a hoax. Yet, due to the distance and foreignness of the boy's world, the narrator finds herself unable to judge whether or not the boy was telling the truth. From this she consequently concludes that there are no common standards between her world and his, and that the truth will never be known:

I tried to penetrate the innocent cold mask of his proud face, but nobody can know the secrets of his incredible far world. It is a moon world; no science can account for all its mysteries. The little brigand will never tell the truth about what he saw – *can*, indeed, never tell the truth, for the truth is not cosmopolitan enough to be common both to his world and mine. (p. 161)

Benson's narrator is not omniscient. There are things the narrator can't penetrate, and this is a feature of modernist writing. The mystery of *other people*, Benson seems to suggest, is one that cannot be overcome, even in fiction. Her work alternates between the severe modernist position of 'the only reality is that of the self', strongly present in 'Reflections in the Mirror', and a less severe version where one can describe other people but not understand them because there is nothing common or shared in a world of individual selves. The fixity of social knowledge has been lost and replaced by the relativity of individual time, perspective and standards, as the rise of Henry James's 'psychological realism' testifies: 'reality lay in human consciousness and the fathomless workings of the

²⁵ Stella Benson, 'Wild Pygmies Afloat', *NSN*, 5 August 1933, pp. 159-60 (p. 159). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

mind'.²⁶ Peter Childs describes this modernist shift to psychology and individual consciousness as a challenge to the 'hegemony of realism' through 'alternative ways of representing reality and the world', together with an emphasis on alienation, isolation, introversion, loneliness, scepticism, and uncertainty.²⁷

It is, however, not only innovations on the levels of form and theme that characterise modernism, what Raymond Williams described as 'elements of strangeness and distance, indeed of alienation', but also, as Williams argues, a more socio-historical shift in the location of the modern intellectual, 'the fact of immigration to the metropolis': 'For it is not the general themes of response to the city and its modernity which compose anything that can be properly called Modernism. It is rather the new and specific location of the artists and intellectuals of this movement within the changing cultural milieu of the metropolis'.²⁸

Benson (like Katherine Mansfield and Joyce) epitomises this new position of the intellectual. Having left her aristocratic home, gone and worked in East London, and then left again to California and the Far East, Benson was in fact both an immigrant and 'émigré'.²⁹ As a writer she is constituted by the dynamics, processes, and relationships of the metropolis (which Williams describes as both a 'social form' and a 'specific historical form'), where the medium of art comes increasingly to define and dominate artistic

²⁶ Peter Childs, *Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 45. Next quotation is from p. 3.

²⁷ Childs is a good guide to the range of responses which fall under the rubric of 'modernism'. His detailed and very informative account focuses on both cultural trends and individual writers; it also incorporates discussions of female modernists resurrected in Bonnie Kime Scott's *The Gender of Modernism: An Anthology*, which makes, as yet, no mention of Benson's work.

²⁸ Raymond Williams, 'Metropolitan Location and the Emergence of Modernism', in *The Politics of Modernism*, ed. by Tony Pinkney (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 37-48, (p. 45, p. 44).

²⁹ For English exiles and émigrés in modernism see Terry Eagleton, *Exiles and Emigrés: Studies in Modern Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970).

production.³⁰ Her *NSN* pieces testify to her modernist metropolitan concerns, her own crisis of representation, signification and explanation. For a journal inclined towards realism, it is to the *NSN*'s credit that it provided regular space for Benson's modernist aesthetic experimentation.

³⁰ Williams, 'Metropolitan Location', p. 46.

6.3 The Foreigner Englishman: The Humanist Individualism of V. S. Pritchett

Metropolitan location, travel, strangeness, and foreignness are also relevant to another *NSN* writer, V. S. Pritchett. In his contribution to a collection of essays about making it as a writer in London entitled *Coming to London* Pritchett says that expatriation unveiled England for him by making it foreign: 'English people became foreign to me and that was an advantage, for it removed some of the drabness, the curtain of convention with which, very cunningly, we cover up what is really going on in our lives'. In fact, Pritchett concluded: 'London became London to me when it became foreign'.³¹

This 'foreign' dimension is not just a passing recognition for Pritchett; it is central to his constitution as a modern writer. After spending most of the 20s abroad (in Paris, Dublin, and Spain), Pritchett came to see 'foreignness' as a necessary experience of the act of writing; to write one has to be foreign, as he put in his brilliant autobiography: 'I became a foreigner. For myself that is what a writer is – a man living on the other side of a frontier'.³² In a remarkably clear and self-analytical statement about his position as a writer, Pritchett says: 'I am pretty sure that although I am often described as a traditional English writer, any originality in my writing is due to having something of a foreign mind' (Autobiography, p. 399).³³

Though occupying a similar metropolitan location to Benson, Pritchett's class formation was different. His origins in petty-bourgeois English suburban non-conformism, his admiration for Irish and Russian realism (Liam O'Flaherty and

³¹ V. S. Pritchett, 'Coming to London: 3', in *Coming to London*, ed. by John Lehman and William Plomer (London: Phoenix House, 1957), pp. 36-49, (p. 48, p. 49).

³² V. S. Pritchett, *A Cab at the Door & Midnight Oil* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968, 1971; repr. New York: The Modern Library, 1994), p. 211. Hereafter as 'Autobiography'.

³³ In an interview conducted with Pritchett on his 85th birthday he still maintained that: 'I'm tremendously European in my connections [...] Anything foreign interests me more than England does. I'm a natural

Turgenev), and his socialism and political radicalism – exemplified in his views on Ireland –³⁴ meant that in his fiction he was far more concerned with expressing the distinctiveness of individual characters than their fragmentation or sense of isolation. For Pritchett, human beings are different, and it is his vocation as a writer to raise them out of the level of generality (of society) and voice their individuality: ‘I began to feel that the writer had to justify the character he’s describing [...] One has to let them have a voice, to see what it is that makes them distinctive in their own eyes’.³⁵ Pritchett’s aesthetic strategy is to justify his character’s individuality and particularity (what he elsewhere describes as that which ‘separates the individual from others of his kind’³⁶), as he explains in his autobiography: ‘I was much less interested in the ‘People’ than in the condition of individual people’, and ‘I am interested in the revelations of a nature and (rather in Ibsen’s fashion) of exposing the illusions or received ideas by which they live or protect their dignity’ (Autobiography, p. 398). Martin Amis has praised Pritchett’s ‘quietly extraordinary way of looking at life’ and wrote admiringly about his artistic technique:

Pritchett’s method is in fact very simple, though vastly ambitious in its way: he tries to interpret the world through the romantic, nervous and mystical thoughts of his own characters, who are seldom remarkable except in their peculiar

European’ (Joseph Lelyveld, ‘V. S. Pritchett, in Step with the Years, Writes On’, *The New York Times* (Book Review), (16 December 1985), p. 2). This issue will be discussed further in the conclusion.

³⁴ Pritchett’s time in Ireland was, he said in his autobiography, a ‘course in the foundation of states’: ‘If Ireland moved me, it also instructed me. As a political education, the experience was excellent. One was observing a revolution: a country set free, a new young state, the first modern defeat of colonialism’ (p. 314). His self-declared socialism seems to have been of the transformative not Fabian-reformist type, as his comments on his wartime political diary suggest: ‘I find myself expressing the general view that English society must be revolutionised’ (p. 405). His favourite description of himself was by the BBC: ‘“Embittered, left wing intellectual” ’ (p. 408).

³⁵ ‘V. S. Pritchett’ in *Novelists in Interview* ed. by John Haffenden (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 210-30, (p. 211).

³⁶ Douglass A. Hughes, ‘V. S. Pritchett: An Interview’, *Studies in Short Fiction*, 13 (Fall 1976), pp. 423-33, (p. 426).

ordinariness. If one thing underlies his work it is the constantly dramatised proposition that ordinary people are really extraordinarily strange.³⁷

Pritchett's artistic process of vindicating (rather than judging) the individual self in his fiction is one way he felt himself moving away from the burden of Victorian morality. As he once remarked in an interview, his experience of European culture liberated him from the Victorian morality of 'judging': 'My reading of French novels and Spanish novels liberated me from the enormous, rather crushing moral power of the Victorian novel'.³⁸ His focus on individual variety rather than generality he sees as part of his attempt to distance himself from the dominant morality of Victorian realism, a stance dubbed by his *Paris Review* interviewers as 'a very anti-nineteenth century idea': 'Yes, very. I hesitate on sweeping judgements, and, after all, it's variety in human nature that's interesting'.³⁹

Pritchett's first short story in the *NS* was published in 1928, when he was a regular book reviewer for the journal. 'In the Haunted Room' was later included in Pritchett's least favourite collection of stories, *The Spanish Virgin, and Other Stories* (1930), from which he never republished material. It is a story about social mobility and the class nostalgia manifested in the protagonist's hallucinatory experience of waking up in his aristocratic host's mansion to a strong smell of fried steaks and onions in his bedroom. Hunger comes to symbolise his dis-satisfaction with his recently acquired earldom: 'Heaven, now he came to think of it, he had not had a decent meal, not what he called a decent meal, since he had come into this title and all this damned money. From

³⁷ Martin Amis, 'In Praise of Pritchett', *The War Against Cliché: Essays and Reviews, 1971-2000* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001), pp. 65-71, (p. 65, p. 71).

³⁸ Ben Forkner and Phillipe Sejourne, 'An Interview with V. S. Pritchett', *Journal of the Short Story in English* 6 (Spring 1986), 11-38, (p. 26).

³⁹ Shusha Guppy and Anthony Weller, 'V. S. Pritchett', *The Paris Review* 117, 32 (Winter 1990), pp. 182-207, (p. 198).

mill hand to earldom! From your money's worth to starvation, was more like it!'.⁴⁰ His past in the form of his earlier class position haunts him. Such restlessness and lack of comfort with circumstance is characteristic of Pritchett's early impressionistic social portraits. Unlike many writers who leave their class origins never to return, even imaginatively, Pritchett's lower middle-class suburban milieu is strongly present in his fictive concerns and preoccupations, as the following discussion of his 30s pieces will show.

In all, Pritchett published 10 short stories in the *NSN* in the 30s, the majority of which appeared under Raymond Mortimer's editorship from 1935 onwards; Pritchett was later to describe Mortimer as 'a brilliant literary editor' (Autobiography, p. 412).⁴¹ Pritchett's involvement with the *NS* was long lasting; he succeeded Mortimer as literary editor (1945–49) and served as a Director of the journal (1951–1978). His 30s short stories in the journal can be roughly divided into two groups, the ones with a more social-critical edge to them, criticising specific social conditions and institutions, and the other, more individual-oriented stories, expressing specific fictional social relationships and encounters.

'The Upright Man' belongs to the first category and is, arguably, distinctive for its historical sweep – covering pre-war to post-war events – and its portrayal of hegemony's changing priorities and demands on clerical labour. It is a personal as well as a social portrait of an industrious and repressed clerk called Calvert:

⁴⁰ V. S. Pritchett, 'In the Haunted Room', *NS*, 24 March 1928, pp. 760–61, (p. 760).

⁴¹ Most of the collected *NSN* short stories appear in *You Make Your Own Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1938). The following ones are, to my knowledge, still uncollected: 'Slooter's Vengeance', *NSN*, (28 March 1938), pp. vi–vii; 'Conversation Piece', *NSN*, (7 December 1935), pp. 857–8; 'The Chimney', *NSN* (26 December 1936), pp. 1061–3; 'The Storm', *NSN* (18 December 1937), pp. 1061–2.

Calvert did not spend himself in gestures or extravagances. He kept himself apart [...] Soldierly in duty, remembering his mother, scrupulous in poverty, when others laughed only smiling, saying two words while others spoke ten, eating sparingly alone, secret in life and parsimonious of himself. He trod the path of a single preoccupation, an instinctive loneliness. He conserved himself, every sinew was restraining.⁴²

The first to bow over his desk, Calvert was, paradoxically, an upright man. Pritchett depicts a suffocating atmosphere and constraining surroundings. Calvert, restless at the beginning ('the chains unfamiliar') looks up to the sky and waits for a miracle. The buildings opposite block the sky view and no miracle occurs, until, that is, 'the gods, his gaolers, got drunk and went mad'. They demanded he stand up and spend his life for his country, saying: ' "Blood. Life. You're a hero. Go and kill" '. The time of 'freedom and uprightness' had come, 'And indeed the whole world of men had changed': 'This was a supreme duty. All his life he had waited, to stand in all his stature and fullness, attending the Passion'. While standing in the trenches one day, Calvert is shot in the head by a sniper. After months in a coma with the bullet still in his head, and when the war had already ended, he wakes up. What could a man 'fixed now in the discipline of uprightness for ever' do: 'Many pitied him. But life requires pliable men. Regimentation of the pliable, they said; it was the lesson of the war. All must bend to the wheel together. No head out of alignment' (p. 857). His permanently upright position makes it impossible for him to return to his former clerical work of bowing over a desk. While going from one place to another asking for work, it becomes clear to him that that is the only thing he can do, so he becomes an office messenger: 'A messenger, walking from room to room, standing in lifts, waiting at desks, an intermediary, lifeless. Not a live man, nor a dead

⁴² V. S. Pritchett, 'The Upright Man', *NSN*, 31 December 1932, pp. 856-7 (p. 856). Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent quotations are from page 856.

man, a man now without all means of desiring anything, a man indelibly alone not looking up nor down. An upright man' (p. 857).

'The Upright Man' is a cruel, allegorical story about powerlessness and exploitation. With its emphasis on regimentation, pliability, and the rigidity of contemporary work practices, it has many similarities with R. M. Fox's earlier *NS* 'Factory Life' (1920). The use of Taylorist and Fordist language of production is common to both, as is the emphasis on control, domination, and the mechanisation of labour. Pritchett manages to capture the shifting needs of hegemony and its impact on labour, conveying the continuity between commercial and military labour of rigid norms and forms of organisation. Even though, as Fox's piece in the early 20s conveys, conflict and struggle are intrinsic to such a labour process and workers (unlike Calvert) do fight over how their work is conducted and structured, Pritchett's representation of the practices of coercion and domination is still valid because real, though in reality it was more contested than he allows for in the story. The depiction of the dominant work ethic as overpowering can be explained, however, by the fact that when Pritchett was writing in the 30s labour would have seemed more helpless and less powerful than when Fox was writing during the industrial disputes of the early 20s. By the early 30s, Pritchett would have already witnessed the devastating failure of the General Strike in 1926, the backlash against trade-union organisation, the steep rise in unemployment, and the general worsening condition of the working class in England.

The theme of the control of the individual by state ideology and social structures can also be found in 'X-ray', another of Pritchett's *NSN* stories. Set in a hospital department, where 'You are cut off from the world', this piece builds up an atmosphere

of confinement and bureaucratic domination: 'There are four benches in the waiting-room and a high window, and none of the waiting people are speaking though the air is nervous with their wanting to speak'.⁴³ Evoking the smells, scenes, noises, and feel of the place, Pritchett focuses on the institutional mastery over human relationships, and their regimentation and mechanisation, as the following encounter between a nurse and a patient shows: ' "Breath out. Pull up the trousers. Get down. Dress. Go outside and wait. You may put your coat on". Each sentence is exact and part of a formula' (p. 129).

Pritchett's hostility to such bureaucratic forms of administration is also apparent in his contribution to *Why Do I Write?*: 'I have always disliked the way the State and the great institutions house themselves. I dislike the light glossy varnish, the tiles that so often line the walls of the corridors as if the place was some official urinal. I dislike the official disinfectants, the cold dreary fractious voices of the little martinets with a pension and a timeless complacency that goes with it'.⁴⁴ Like the Victorian morality he found burdensome, Pritchett resents the disciplinarian patronage of modern state institutions and the relationships they generate. His criticisms are strong, specific, and voiced in the name of human dignity, a value the safeguard of which was not a priority for British state policy in the 30s, as the following example shows.

'Main Road' is a story about the burning working-class issue of the 30s, unemployment. Comparative unemployment figures for 1931, for example, clearly demonstrate the extent of the problem, as the historian Ross McKibbin has argued: 'At any one time in that year [1931] between one-fifth and one-quarter of the working class was unemployed. The *majority* of working men and women in the interwar years were at

⁴³ V. S. Pritchett, 'X-ray', *NSN*, (30 July 1932), pp. 128-29 (p. 128)

some moment in their lives genuinely unemployed; the *majority* of the middle classes never faced such unemployment at all'.⁴⁵ The contradiction between Britain's imperial position as one of the wealthiest and most powerful countries in the world and its high rate of domestic unemployment was stark: 'The early thirties thus faced large sections of the British people with a virtual breakdown of the whole economic system under which they lived. One of the richest countries in the world was patently unable to provide great numbers of its people with any way of making a living'.⁴⁶ In addition, the humiliating Means Test was introduced by the National Government in late 1931 when the unemployed numbered 2.7 million. This meant that what was previously regarded as a right was now subject to a test.⁴⁷ Poverty and unemployment became the dominant reality of the British working class in the 30s. Though contested by, for example, the small communist National Unemployed Workers Union led by Wal Hannington, the problems of unemployment could not be resolved by the Government's disastrously protectionist and conservative policies in the 30s and were only really overcome during the War.⁴⁸

In the decade after the defeat of the General Strike and before the emergence of the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil war, the Left felt politically powerless, as Pritchett affirms in his autobiography: 'The social conscience of a generation had been aroused. The cause of our anger lay in our powerlessness in a society ruled by torpid old

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Bowen, Graham Greene, and V.S. Pritchett, *Why Do I Write?: An Exchange of Views Between Elizabeth Bowen, Graham Greene & V. S. Pritchett* (London: P. Marshall, 1948), p. 17.

⁴⁵ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 60, original emphasis.

⁴⁶ Noreen Branson and Margot Heineman, *Britain in the Thirties* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p. 15.

⁴⁷ See Branson and Heineman, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties*, p. 33.

⁴⁸ For NUWM see Wal Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles 1919-1936: My Life and Struggles Amongst the Unemployed* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1936); and, more recently, Richard Croucher, *We Refuse to Starve in Silence: A History of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, 1920-46* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987).

men. One could not go to an industrial town without seeing the terrible sight of unemployed men walking the streets, ten yards apart from one another and never speaking, wandering from shop window to shop window' (Autobiography, p. 394). The construction and consolidation of a 'social conscience' would become the main contribution of the radical, reformist fraction of the bourgeoisie, Bloomsbury. As Raymond Williams says in his description of the dynamics of this process: 'a fraction of an upper class, breaking from its dominant majority, relates to a lower class *as a matter of conscience*: not in solidarity, nor in affiliation, but as an extension of what are still felt as personal or small-group obligations'.⁴⁹ Pritchett didn't share Bloomsbury's power, class formation, or social reach; the same pressures, though, operated on them both. His response was qualitatively different from theirs and is exemplified in 'Main Road', an act of imaginative solidarity and a plea for human dignity, engaging with unemployment head on and without Bloomsbury's artistic evasions and illusions of art's social independence. Political radicalism aside, Virginia Woolf's fiction, to take one example, is not concerned with charting British working-class life but with the psychological life of bourgeois individuals. That is why Williams uses the word 'extension' to describe the workings of the 'social conscience': it is the act of extending familiar liberal bourgeois values and thus remaking the working class in Bloomsbury's own image. It is recognition of difference for the purpose of eliminating it. There is a convergence between Bloomsbury's literary and political strategies. The aim is thus to reform, reconstitute in one's own image, and not to describe and, like Pritchett, understand and 'justify'.

⁴⁹ See Raymond Williams, 'The Bloomsbury Fraction' in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 148-69, (p. 155), original emphasis.

In a way, though, Pritchett is also ‘extending’, extending the attention that had been traditionally given to bourgeois characters in fiction to working- and lower-middle-class ones without stereotyping them as comical (like Wells).⁵⁰ But his remains an ‘extension’ for justification and vindication in literature, coupled with a strong belief in political transformation not reform. Referring to the short story that made his reputation in the 30s, ‘Sense of Humour’, published by John Lehmann in *New Writing*, Pritchett describes his writing as being outside bourgeois literary convention: ‘Questions of class were important in the thirties and in giving my uncouth character a voice I was consciously protesting against the dominance of the voice of what is called the high bourgeois sensibility’ (Autobiography, p. 399). In this sense Pritchett continues the nineteenth-century European tradition of giving voice to social groups previously excluded from the realm of fiction, as Valentine Cunningham argues specifically about the British tradition: ‘The history of the nineteenth-century novel at large involves the schooling of British readers to accept provincial, working-class, dialect-speaking ordinary life as an interesting and proper object of fictional attention’.⁵¹

‘Main Road’ thus leaps across class experiences and feelings and allows itself to imagine what unemployed desperation and struggle to exist feel like, as the opening sentences demonstrate:

At the close of a December evening when the roads are like slugs, oozy and gleaming in the cold, two workless and sodden men were shambling along, lost in the side lanes of now silent country [...] Blistered and squelching and gone past the cravings of hunger into a hunched, mechanic misery, the two men went into stupor. It was their third day on the road, and, no longer exchanging any words,

⁵⁰ For Pritchett’s refutation of Wells conception that lower middle-class characters can only but be ‘comical’ see his Autobiography p. 398.

⁵¹ Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p. 321.

cursing the lanes which had snared them into homeless, foodless darkness, they seemed to be groping round and round in a pit.⁵²

‘Mechanic misery’ and ‘groping round and round in a pit’ are two strong descriptions of the workless condition in the 30s. The story tells of the journey of two men (aged fifty and thirty) in search of work, their relationship, and their violent encounter with a youth in a dark country lane: ‘On this third day the object of their journey had been driven from their minds altogether. They did not care if they never got to the town where the factory and the jobs were said to be, nor where they slept’ (p. 711). The whistling and the singing had stopped, and with hunger came hate and begging: ‘But most of all he [the younger man] grew to hate the older man because it was the older man who started begging’ (p. 711). The main road, finally reached, proves to be empty and eerily silent: ‘There was no sound of people. There were no animals moving in the fields. An appalling inhuman vacancy opened in the road’ (p. 712). When suddenly they hear the voice of footsteps coming through the bushes, the old man jumps over and goes to beg. On seeing this, ‘a cold shiver of rage and shame’ springs through the younger one, who then goes over and starts intimidating and threatening the youth. Suddenly things start working as to a rehearsed plan: they steal the bag of food and the money the youth was carrying and leave him in a ditch.

Sitting in a bus at the end, the narrator describes the two men’s different responses to the incident. The older one feels happy and gratified: ‘He loved the world [...] There was light, speed, hilarity everywhere. A feeling of wild irresponsibility overcame the older man’ (712). The younger one, though, has a more negative-critical response:

⁵² V. S. Pritchett, ‘Main Road’, *NSN* (Literary Supplement), 9 May 1936, pp. 711-13 (p. 711). References

Crouching in his seat, he sat alert in the bitter vividness of his vengeance and his pride. There goes the bloody butcher, the bloody baker, money streaming down the world in petrol. Food! He looked at the old man with contempt. What he wanted, his tortured hating soul cried out within him, was not food. (p. 714)

It wasn't for the lack of money or wealth in the world that he is unemployed; money was still 'streaming down the world' the narrator insists. Normality was unaffected, and that the younger unemployed man finds disturbing. It bothers him that life goes on while his own can't or doesn't. What he is really looking for is not disclosed at the end. It's an open question, and the answer depends on the reader. Pritchett here invites reader participation in the formulation of the ending. One possible response could be employment: he just wants to be part of normality. Another, politically more radical, would be that he wants a society where there can be no normality if unemployment exists, where human existence is premised on the dignity and welfare of all. What sort of system of governance or social organisation would promote this is also an open question. It is the reader's job to ask, to answer, to decide. There is no prescription or political dogma in Pritchett's fiction. What he does insist on, though, is that unemployment is not only the unemployed's problem but the reader's problem as well. It is an issue society as a whole needs to address and resolve.

Pritchett's strategy of open-ended short stories is designed to bring in the reader to complete the events.⁵³ It is also used, as Pritchett comments in one of his interviews, by Chekhov: 'I so much admire Chekhov's stories because they're open-ended, and I try to be as open-ended as possible, leaving things hanging: it's terribly difficult for English

are given after quotations in the text.

⁵³ For anti-Victorian open-endedness, see Alan Warren Friedman, *The Turn of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).

writers to do, since some sort of practical or responsible sense works against it'.⁵⁴ By using this technique Pritchett is also making a clear statement about the relationship of art and life, which he makes more explicit in his review-essay on Maupassant: 'The ends of these [Normandy] tales are, so to speak, open. The characters go on living. They are beginning to live their way into a new situation'.⁵⁵ The life of the characters goes on after the story has ended. It is a profoundly humanist and politically radical notion of modern aesthetics. As well as actively involving the reader in the construction/imagining of the ending, it is the responsibility of the writer to convey the notion that the characters are real inventions and that (unlike her Victorian counterpart) she doesn't control their destiny or future. The narrator here withdraws from her Victorian role of omnipotence. This is very much in line with Pritchett's conception of the short story as a restless art of glances rather than of steady and exhaustively analytical novelistic gazes. This point is clearly conveyed in his 'The Writer's Tale': 'We live in a nervous, restless age, ourselves fragmented as we glance at one another. There is no longer a prolonged steady gaze. We are forced to see our own and other people's lives in side glances; we ask for the essence, not the paragraph'.⁵⁶ The short story, for Pritchett, should thus provide what he elsewhere describes as a 'glimpse through' life, a fleeting moment of essence and understanding in a restless and fast-moving world.⁵⁷ This point is reiterated in a short piece he wrote for

⁵⁴ John Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p. 219.

⁵⁵ V. S. Pritchett, 'Maupassant', in *The Other Side of the Frontier: A V. S. Pritchett Reader* (London: Robin Clarke, 1984), pp. 393-400 (p. 398).

⁵⁶ V.S. Pritchett, 'A Writer's Tale', in John J. Stinson, *V.S. Pritchett: A Study of the Short Fiction* (New York: Macmillan 1992), pp. 102-104 (p. 102). Stinson's is the only book-length study of Pritchett and contains an up-to-date bibliography of contemporary criticism and reviews of Pritchett's work. For a biography of Pritchett see Dean R. Baldwin, *V. S. Pritchett* (Boston: Twayne, 1987). Baldwin also wrote Bates's biography, as noted earlier, and has done much for the study of the short story in England.

⁵⁷ Forkner and Sejourne, 'An Interview with V. S. Pritchett', p. 23.

the *London Magazine*: 'the short story is perfectly fitted to the glancing, allusive, nervously decisive and summary moods of contemporary life'.⁵⁸

To return to 'Main Road', this story also belongs to a new type of literature of protest in the 30s, the fiction of the unemployed, canonised in novels like Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole* (1933), and Lewis Jones, *We Live* (1939).⁵⁹ Such fiction emphasises journeying and travel, which is also part of what Valentine Cunningham has described as 30s writing sense of being 'on the road, on the way, into or across new country'.⁶⁰ Where it is all heading is still unknown, as the ending of the story suggests. What is important is the journey, as 'Many are Disappointed', another Pritchett 30s (though non-*NS*) story, clearly demonstrates; yet here, in a twist against the 30s literature of mapping and possessing, the journey to the country pub is fundamentally disappointing, too (unexpectedly) same and ordinary to be anything as exciting as travel or exploration. Journeys for Pritchett are important social events, and arrival isn't as easy or as promising as expected.

Pritchett is charting in a different sense, not only journeys and arrivals but charting lower-middle class, small-town feelings and relationships, as the second group of his 30s *NSN* short stories demonstrates. The sense of both objects and relationships is particularly strong in two such stories, 'Slooter's Vengeance' and 'The Chimney'. In the first case it is a piano and a family relationship, and in the second it is the specific relationship that brings about the construction of a chimney.

⁵⁸ V. S. Pritchett, 'The Short Story', *London Magazine*, (September 1966), pp. 6-9 (p. 6).

⁵⁹ For an extensive discussion of the fiction of unemployment in the 30s see Andy Croft's 'Every MP Should Read It: Unemployment and the Novel', *Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 96-120, where he argues that the unemployed man becomes a literary convention in the 30s.

⁶⁰ Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, p. 226.

Edward Sloomer in 'Sloomer's Vengeance' loves to spend and hates to save, which is an act of self-denial his wife forces him to perform: 'But Sloomer was a man whose one desire was to spend passionately, continuously, recklessly "to cut a dash," notoriously "to blow the lot" '.⁶¹ She is never satisfied with his behaviour and he is always made to feel inferior to her brother-in-law, Ernest, who is a perfect husband: 'Ernest was regular in his habits. Ernest never smoked. Ernest never drank. Ernest never betted. Ernest never missed church. Ernest gave his wife all his money. Ernest never used bad language. Ernest "got on." Ernest saved. Ernest was a good father' (p. vi). Sloomer is delighted when one day Ernest runs off with a girl at the factory, abandoning his wife and daughter Gladys. Sloomer plans his revenge on his wife and everybody around him: 'An overwhelming and abasing revenge of generosity he was looking for' (p. vi). He decides to spend the money he was saving for his wife's piano on buying Gladys the piano Ernest had promised her before he left. Spending his savings in one go gives Sloomer great pleasure: 'He was transfigured. For a moment he was at the summit of his life' (p. vii). Mrs. Sloomer is shattered and overwhelmed by his act of generosity. Sitting at her in-laws place, she looks at him in tearful amazement: 'Sloomer went round and rolled and waded and splashed about in their abasement and gratitude. The more they wept and laughed and thanked and crawled at his feet, the more he lorded it' (p. vii). Finding himself unexpectedly moved by their tears, Sloomer begins gradually to regret his vengeful deed. His misery is increased when one day Ernest suddenly returns to his wife and daughter. At the end, Sloomer's revenge feels more like a self-induced punishment; his act of generosity and dash for freedom more like further confinement. The irony is that the

⁶¹ V. S. Pritchett, 'Sloomer's Vengeance', *NSN* (Spring Books Supplement), pp. vi-vii (p. vi). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

expression of his individuality (his real nature, his essence) leads to his unhappiness, a double bind if ever there was one since he can't be happy without expressing it and its expression makes him miserable.⁶²

Though the narration is focused on Slooter, the story is very much about his relationship with his family. It provides a socially textured description of Slooter and his social and psychological motivations. Slooter's vengeance is both a personal and a social act, as is his love of spending. What preoccupies Pritchett here is the relationship between the two, or, the form that individuality has to take in the sphere of sociality.

'The Chimney' also is about how individuality is expressed and negotiated in ordinary social relationships, this time in the labour involved in making a chimney: 'It took two men to make us warm for the winter: Cotty, the half-time postman who built us the new chimney and Barclay who cut down the trees and split the logs for its fire'.⁶³ With detailed character descriptions and brief biographies, Pritchett sets the scene for the dynamics of the story. Barclay, a widower peasant, linked to the land by labour and tradition, dislikes the amateurish skill of the townie Cotty: 'Cotty was one of those spare-time handyman who when asked to do a job, tell you they have never done *that* before, but that they don't mind having a go at it [...] He was the perpetual amateur, the man whose delight is to do something he knows nothing about' (p. 1062). As the narrator remarks, Barclay, who helped Cotty with building the chimney, is suspicious of Cotty: 'There was the old, dumb opposition of town and country between the two men and myself looking out of the window at them. Barclay, the man of one trade and that the

⁶² For Pritchett's pursuit of 'essence' in human character, see his interview with John Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, p. 219. He concludes his interview by emphasising this: 'The business of getting at the "essence" still very much preoccupies me' (p. 230).

most ancient in the world, had no place for this man who builds a chimney one day and a staircase the next' (p. 1062). Curiosity takes the better of Barclay and every time Cotty comes down from the ladder of the chimney Barclay goes up to have a look. This drives Cotty mad: 'Down Cotty, up Barclay. "Damn that old man," muttered Cotty, "he's always up my chimney." A duel began between the two men. And it did not end until the last brick was laid' (p. 1062). This dynamic of opposition, curiosity, work, and co-operation fuels the story and gives the chimney, an object, a sense of history and a context of social relationship. To read from the chimney, the product, back into the relationship that made it possible is, Pritchett seems to suggest, the task of reading and interpretation. That is the way the story is narrated, slowly adding life and texture to an object. At a time when labour was becoming standardised and massified, Pritchett recreates in 'The Chimney' a localised, distinctive, and individual form of work, where social relationships are made more visible, less hidden.

As mentioned earlier, Pritchett puts strong emphasis on the local and individual. He is always after what is particular and distinctive. Love and erotic encounter (failed or successful) are also part of this emphasis. Three short stories in the *NSN* deal with love: the much-discussed and critically acclaimed 'You Make Your Own Life' (a triangular love relationship); 'A Spring Morning' (an unemployed youth and a shop assistant); 'A Clark's Tale' (a clerk's obsessive pursuit of a girl he meets on the train).⁶⁴ Set in suburbia, the short stories have a dark streak that works against the notion of safe and

⁶³ V. S. Pritchett, 'The Chimney', *NSN*, 26 December 1936, pp. 1061-3 (p. 1061). References are given after quotations in the text.

⁶⁴ V. S. Pritchett, 'You Make Your Own Life', *NSN*, 4 September 1937, pp. 337-9; V. S. Pritchett, 'A Spring Morning', *NSN*, 9 March 1935, pp. 312-4; V. S. Pritchett, 'The Clerk's Tale', *NSN*, 11 March 1939, pp. 354-5.

secure small-town relationships. They exemplify what Pritchett has described as ‘the personal anarchy of unsettled modern life’ (Autobiography, p. 400).

There is nothing timeless or static about Pritchett’s fiction. His fictive individuals are always involved in relationships, always struggling with or trying to hide something. His *métier* as a writer is to reveal or expose that – what he once called the ‘self-imagination’ of the characters – while maintaining their dignity.⁶⁵ What he once said about puritanism in his essay on Edmund Gosse very much describes his own narrative focus and aesthetic outlook: ‘Outwardly the extreme puritan appears narrow, crabbed, fanatical, gloomy and dull; but from the inside – what a series of dramatic climaxes his life is, what a fascinating casuistry beguiles him, how he is bemused by the comedies of duplicity, sharpened by the ingenious puzzles of the conscience, and carried away by the eloquence of hypocrisy’.⁶⁶ It is this aspect or dimension, as ‘Slooter’s Vengeance’ shows, that Pritchett is interested in exploring in his fiction.

The emphasis on puritanism in Pritchett’s fiction, though formative in his life, has tended to overshadow or overpower other interpretations of his fiction: as more foreign-inspired – as Pritchett himself acknowledges and as I tried to show throughout my discussion. Walter Allen says that Pritchett is ‘the connoisseur of puritanism’ and Cunningham states that Pritchett’s life ‘was marked from the start by a very particular set of English inheritances’ and that ‘his fictions have been holding up a wonderfully lucid mirror to the southern working-class and petit bourgeois realities of our island race for

⁶⁵ Douglas A. Hughes, ‘V. S. Pritchett: An Interview’, p. 429.

⁶⁶ V. S. Pritchett, ‘A Plymouth Brother’ in *The Complete Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1991), pp. 234-9, (p. 234).

over half a century'.⁶⁷ Both see Pritchett as a 'kind of shorter Dickens' (Cunningham's phrase), whom Pritchett has certainly identified as an early and important influence. However, reading Pritchett as an English writer only, continuing the tradition of Victorian realism, falls short of explaining why Pritchett himself, as I argued at the beginning, has done so much to emphasise that any originality in his writing is due to foreign influences, many of which are indeed mentioned by Cunningham in his review (Chekhov, Tolstoy, Balzac, Unamuno).⁶⁸ Though it is true to say that: 'If ever an *oeuvre* was steeped in its producer's origins, Pritchett's is',⁶⁹ it is at least as true to say that without continental, Russian, and Irish influences Pritchett's origins would never have been liberated into art. The foreign unleashed the native; to paraphrase Pritchett, the native could only be seen through foreign eyes. Such a dialectical unity would do more justice to Pritchett's work than an emphasis on either the English or the foreign can do.

In addition, an English approach to Pritchett would have to foreground subject matter (lower middle-class English suburban non-conformism) over form. Over-emphasising the English content⁷⁰ and the English realist tradition would thus risk undermining Pritchett's significant innovations on the level form. It is said of the 30s that, as Cunningham put it: 'Formal innovativeness in British fiction was generally left to the obviously bourgeois (like Virginia Woolf), or to the non-radical (like Joyce)'.⁷¹ Yet,

⁶⁷ Walter Allen, *The Short Story in English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 268. Valentine Cunningham, 'The Flesh-and-Bone Merchant', rev. of *The Complete Short Stories and Lasting Impressions*, *TLS* (23-29 November 1990), pp. 1255-56 (p. 1255).

⁶⁸ Just to note in passing that Pritchett wrote 'Tolstoy', *NSN*, 28 December 1935, pp. 1013-4. The three biographies Pritchett wrote (and his travel books) are very much on non-English subjects, as Cunningham himself notes: *Balzac* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973); *Chekhov: A Spirit Set Free* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988); *The Gentle Barbarian: The Life and Work of Turgenev* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1977).

⁶⁹ Cunningham, 'The Flesh-and-Bone Merchant', p. 1255.

⁷⁰ This is, of course, often not the case as the following Spanish-set *NSN* piece testifies: 'Conversation Piece' (7 December 1935), pp. 857-8.

⁷¹ Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, p. 321.

the association between bourgeois and innovation to the exclusion of working-class or politically-committed fiction is far from true about 30s literature. This has been demonstrated by Ken Worpole in his inspiring 'Expressionism and Working-Class Fiction' and, more recently, by Cunningham himself.⁷² Pritchett's fiction is very relevant to challenging the bourgeois/innovation association. His critique of Victorian realism through 'justifying' individuals in fiction, his questioning of narrative closure, omnipotence, and harmony, and his adoption of a Chekhovian open-endedness, and, finally, his conception of the short story as a 'glimpse through' life are sufficient evidence to support the argument that formal innovation and experimentation was not confined to bourgeois modernism. In fact, his search and struggle for essence and truth in character has deep affinities with what Eagleton describes as modernism's 'struggle for meaning'.⁷³ Essence or the liberal humanist unified subject comes to represent meaning for Pritchett. And finally, Pritchett's views on the function of the short story are politically radical and have Brechtian overtones. For Pritchett, readers shouldn't be encouraged to ' "lose themselves" ' in fiction but 'find' themselves: 'The best stories wake you up. Even if they wake you up to the preposterous things, they do wake you up'.⁷⁴ Pritchett's significance to the *NSN* and to 30s fiction thus lies in mixing together realist representationalism, innovative formalism, and a radical political commitment to ordinary life to produce the most important contribution to the short story in Britain.

⁷² Ken Worpole, 'Expressionism and Working-Class Fiction', *New Left Review* 130 (Nov-Dec 1981), 83-96; and Valentine Cunningham, 'The Age of Anxiety and Influence; or, Tradition and the Thirties Talents', in *Rewriting the Thirties: Modernism and After*, ed. by Keith Williams and Steven Matthews (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 5-22.

⁷³ Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', p. 69.

⁷⁴ Ben Forkner and Phillipe Sejourne, 'An Interview with V. S. Pritchett', p. 34.

6.4 Peter Chamberlain: Snapshot Documentary

Innovation in the short-story form also comes from another quarter in the *NSN* in the 30s. Under Raymond Mortimer's editorship, the literary section publishes seven short stories by Peter Chamberlain, a member of the 'Birmingham Group'. The main facts about his life can be found in Walter Allen's autobiography *As I Walked Down New Grub Street*.⁷⁵ Allen mentions that Chamberlain came from a rich Northern manufacturing family (like Henry Green, incidentally), had studied at Clifton (a public school which features in fictional disguise in one of his short stories), worked as a motor cycle journalist, and was in touch with the London literary scene, knowing Anthony Powell quite well.⁷⁶ Allen found him arrogant and smug at first, and stated that he stood in complete contrast to another member of the Group, working-class Brummie writer Leslie Halward.⁷⁷ Hemingway and Fitzgerald were his literary heroes.

Allen also relates the following striking incident about Chamberlain's first short story ever to be published in the *NSN*, 'What The Hell?': 'It was published in the *New Statesman*, and on the Monday after publication a postcard arrived there saying the story was the most original thing the writer of the postcard had read for several years. The writer of the postcard was I. A. Richards. I think now that Peter had good reason to be

⁷⁵ See also Peter Chamberlain, 'Autobiographical Note', in *Under Thirty: An Anthology*, ed. by Michael Harrison (London: Rich & Cowan, 1939), p. 121.

⁷⁶ Walter Allen, *As I Walked Down New Grub Street: Memories of a Writing Life* (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 68-9. For a fictional representation of a repressive and outdated public school (another 30s bourgeois motif) see Peter Chamberlain, '“Thanks for Mercies Past Received”', *NSN*, 22 May 1937, pp. 847-48.

⁷⁷ For information about the Birmingham Group see Andy Croft, 'The Birmingham Group: Literary Life Between the Wars', *London Magazine* (June 1983), 13-22. Croft is the only contemporary critic, to my knowledge, who has written anything about Peter Chamberlain, who is also mentioned in Croft's *Red Letter Days* (1991).

smug'.⁷⁸ With friends and admirers like these, Chamberlain's access to magazines was secured.

The most distinctive aspect of 'What the Hell?' is its ungrammatical first-person narration: crisp, honest, down-to-earth, and heroically ordinary. Though the identity of the narrator is never stated and remains ambiguous, the petty bourgeois, possession-proud strain is quite pronounced. It is in fact a story about possessions, their accumulation and admiration: horses, houses, a cigarette case, a gold wrist watch, gold-plated accessories, walking shoes, overcoats, posh clothes, a bowler hat, socks, ties, a furnished London flat, etc. There are also expensive habits and holidays. As the narrator says at the beginning: 'I got everything I want. Look at it all ways I have'. He ends his account with: 'Yes, I've got pretty well everything I want. Well, then? Well, then? What the sweet Hell?'.⁷⁹ The story is effectively a list of possessions, making the point that fiction is an act of brandishing bourgeois possessions. Chamberlain here satirises the bourgeois notion that power to possess is power to narrate, where narration is the social and cultural extension of possession. However, though satirising is discrediting, it clearly doesn't present a clear alternative practice, and here Chamberlain seems to be going along with the dominant bourgeois assumption he is working to undermine. The narrative, though satirical, remains bourgeois. The story's originality, though, lies in taking 'narration as possession' literally; and this could well be the reason why Allen calls it an 'astonishingly fresh story'.

It is also possible to argue that Chamberlain is satirising bourgeois documentary so prevalent in 30s literature, and epitomised by the magazine *Fact*, by using what

⁷⁸ Allen, *As I Walked Down*, p. 68.

⁷⁹ Peter Chamberlain, 'What The Hell?', *NSN*, 12 January 1935, pp. 40-41 (p. 40, p.41).

Cunningham calls 'documentary exactitudes' preserved for working-class life in order to describe middle-class life.⁸⁰ Interpreted thus, Chamberlain would here be working against the bourgeois documentary approach by using it against its dominant form and twisting it back on itself: a discourse developed to read across the class divide is alternatively used to describe its own social origins.

Formal experimentation is also a prominent feature of two other Chamberlain short stories published in the *NSN*: 'Suburban Exercise' and 'Belgravian Exercise'. Both have a quick, associative, stream-of-consciousness style of narration, jumping from one event or story to another. Neither has any set characters. 'Suburban Exercise' brings together different and unrelated events, happenings, snippets, and stories, as if the only way to chart suburban life is to do it through what Virginia Woolf in *Between the Acts* dubs 'orts, scraps, and fragments'. The story opens with: 'The long-haired dog barked furiously when the post-man came'; and moves on to making statements about a man selling brushes, the grocer's boy, the butcher, the parlour maid, laundry and tennis balls, etc:

They have spoilt the master's shirts at the laundry again; they will have to make us an allowance, that is all.
 These tennis balls will be clean enough for the Holloways [...]
 Sometimes American domestic dramas are apt to be boring, but this is a splendid picture. The other is a British picture, I think.
 Our roses have done very well this year; we have had a magnificent show, although we only have a man in twice a week to keep the place tidy.⁸¹

It is not very clear whether the narration is uni- or multivocal: is it one individual's fragmented and piecemeal view of suburbia or a camera-like shift in scene from one narrative voice to another. This remains unclear.

⁸⁰ Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, p. 303-4.

⁸¹ Peter Chamberlain, 'Suburban Exercise', *NSN*, 23 February 1935, pp. 245-6 (p. 245).

Such ambiguity is also a feature of 'Belgravian Exercise', which is more eclectic stylistically, containing narrative pieces (as before) as well as police notices, street announcements and placards, and grocery notices. It is a stylistic 'orts, scraps, and fragments', bringing together different narrative genres under the heading of suburban experience. Another innovation on 'Suburban Exercise' is that each statement here is a separately numbered paragraph, and the short story runs from 1 to 26. For example:

2. No matter how frequently I complain, the boy who delivers my papers on Sundays simply throws them on the ground instead of pushing them through the letter box [...]
16. Police Notice. Found straying. Where: St. Pancras. When: 14.4.38. Sex: Female. Name: unknown. Age: About 70. Height: 5ft. 2in. Hair: Grey. Complexion: Sallow. Eyes: Grey. Peculiarities: Several long hairs on chin. Many teeth missing. 5in. scar on left foreleg. Dress: Blue coat, blue skirt, no hat, shabby. Now: St. Pancras Hospital, St. Pancras. (Deemed unsound mind).⁸²

Or

19. After 8 p.m. on weekdays and Sundays and 9 p.m. on Saturdays FRUIT can only be sold to customers who are passengers on a railway train and who are in possession of a ticket.
20. This hairdressing saloon is open on Sundays only to hotel residents. (p. 778)

This compilation of scenes, situations, complaints and facts, emphasises the shifting narrative perspective: zooming in, zooming out, moving on. Chamberlain here seems to be putting forward a conception of the short story similar to Pritchett's 'glancing through' technique: not dwelling and excavating like the novelistic gaze but momentarily focusing on an object before moving on. Pritchett associated this way of looking with the rise of a new, restless modern age. This form of looking belongs to the metropolis, and can be read as part of what Raymond Williams called 'the general themes of response to the city

⁸² Peter Chamberlain, 'Belgravian Exercise', *NSN* (Literary Supplement), 12 November 1938, pp. 777-8 (p. 777). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

and its modernity'.⁸³ The metropolis is seen as a 'specific historical form', generating a new metropolitan location for intellectuals and new and complex ways of responding to metropolitan life. Chamberlain's response is characterised by a shifting perspective within a unified space (whether suburbia or London). His fictive exercises aim to convey a range of behaviours, events, and situations that characterise a particular city or social space.

The other 3 *NSN* pieces are less experimental and more focused on stories of individuals or specific narrative events. Two of them are about encounters: brief but potentially transformative social events.⁸⁴ 'Brief Encounter' is a story about a driving tour on the continent, again evoking the 30s theme of things happening on the way, on the road, in-between. While passing through the border crossing between fascist Italy and France the narrator caught a glance of a woman he immediately recognises for being the love of his life: 'I knew quite clearly that this was the first girl in my life I had ever wanted to marry. Although I knew nothing about her I was certainly in love with that girl'.⁸⁵ Though the narrator recounts every detail of their encounter, this potentially life-transforming event is strangely passed over and loses centre stage as the narrative progresses, thus continuously pointing to the all-important rhythm of travel and movement across borders. The encounter is but a missed opportunity in a journey back to nowhere in particular.

A different sort of encounter is relayed in 'A Summer's Evening', a story set in a suburb on a rather slow and uneventful Bank Holiday evening. The sense of confinement

⁸³ Williams, 'The Emergence of Modernism', p. 44. Next quotation is from p. 47.

⁸⁴ Chamberlain published one short story, and his only *NS* poem, about a wedding: ' "Called to the Wedding"', *NSN*, 21 January 1939, pp. 82-3; and the poem: 'Nuptials', *NSN*, 6 February 1937, p. 202.

⁸⁵ Peter Chamberlain, 'Brief Encounter', *NSN*, 25 May 1935, pp. 750-51 (750).

and youthful restlessness are highlighted from the outset: 'The band was filling the night with vaguely defined, heady promises; it was impossible to stay frousting indoors [...]' Nothing made him more sullen, more miserably rebellious, than being compelled to explain his every action to his parents'.⁸⁶ Standing at the edge of his front door gate, 'sensing the familiar hodge-podge of suburban smells' (p. 249), the boy finally decides to go in the direction of the park. His slow, heavy movement is emphasised, as is his dissatisfaction with the suburban scene. The narrative pace quickens when he decides to go to his grandfather's place in the country. Passing some cows and rooks, he comes across two servant girls leaning over a boundary fence. Their encounter is brief and promising, heavy and disappointing: 'For a long minute they all remained in silence, intensely conscious of one another, but tongue-tied, embarrassed, the girls puffing at their cigarettes, the boy searching desperately for something to say' (p. 250). Having taken a fancy to one of the girls, the boy doesn't know 'whether to be pleased or sorry that the encounter had been so short and tame'. The story ends with the boy back at home, sitting on his bed and imagining how had she been alone he would have pulled 'that silly rag off her hair, and ...' (p. 250). Unsatisfied, confined, unfulfilled, the story comes full circle and ends where it begins, in the monotony of suburbia.

Unlike Pritchett's highly individuated social portraits, Chamberlain focuses on events and situations. There is no sense in the encounter that the reader really knows the characters described, or (as in Pritchett) has been shown what makes them distinctive individuals. In that sense Chamberlain's fiction is more detached and documentary in conception than Pritchett's: the boy is just another frustrated boy in the suburbs, he is left

⁸⁶ Peter Chamberlain, 'A Summer's Evening', *NSN*, 24 August 1935, pp. 249-50 (p. 249). References are given after quotations in the text.

un-named and un-individuated. This is Chamberlain's strategy: to go beyond the particular and describe what can be called the condition of suburban existence. It is a strategy that works better with his earlier suburban exercise pieces, when there is no particular fictive event or character and when he brings together disparate events and connects them up to convey a specific mode of existence in the outskirts of the city. Used with fictional individuals, it tends to depersonalise and generalise, in the same way that bourgeois documentary and 30s mass-observation techniques actively did. As Cunningham puts it: 'So documentary exactitudes are called upon to aid the outside, bourgeois observer of working-class life, as the best substitute available for the inside information he [the writer] was short on'.⁸⁷

Pritchett, coming out of the lower middle-class and knowing it, as he said in his autobiography, 'like the palm of my hand' (Autobiography, p. 399), describes it and justifies it from within. He voices its distinctiveness and particularity. Chamberlain, like many other bourgeois writers in the 30s, feels the pressure of the working class on his writing and tries to express it through documentary, thus representing it as a generalised condition. It is certainly possible to make the same point about Chamberlain that Raymond Williams makes about George Orwell, the bourgeois writer who epitomises the documentary style: 'The evidence is collected, often in sharp detail, and the sense of a climate, an atmosphere, is memorably created. But a social structure is not a climate [...]. In a society, these facts [virtues and injustices] are of an active, historical, and developing kind'.⁸⁸ Evoking social life as atmosphere, as climate, risks freezing up what are active,

⁸⁷ Cunningham, *British Writers*, p. 303.

⁸⁸ Raymond Williams, *George Orwell*, 3rd ed. (London: Fontana Press, 1991), p. 23.

complex social relationships into empirical facts: notices, street announcements, and dead possessions.

In fact, Chamberlain and Orwell share not only perspective but background and activity as well. For Allen, in an unpublished essay on 'The Birmingham Group', Chamberlain is 'a quintessentially public school man' who was detached from the realities he evokes in his fiction: 'I suspected he was condescending by being among us, slumming'.⁸⁹ What is lost in bourgeois literary slumming is the social real in fiction, a position which, between Stella Benson, V. S. Pritchett, and Peter Chamberlain, only Pritchett manages to overcome in his emphasise on individuality and social relationships.

⁸⁹ Walter Allen, 'The Birmingham Group' (unpublished essay), (p. 2, p. 4). I am grateful to Andy Croft for very kindly sending me a copy of this essay.

6.5 Ruralism Realised: H. E. Bates in the 30s

H. E. Bates published 8 short stories in the *NSN* in the 30s, the third largest number by any one writer after Michael Zoshchenko and V. S. Pritchett. He also reviewed many books for the journal (through David Garnett)⁹⁰ and published 7 essays on rural affairs and on the annual Chelsea Flower Show; his most famous piece is 'The Lace-makers'.⁹¹ Countryside realism characterises his 30s fiction, where he continues his engagement with country concerns which commenced in the late 20s under the guidance and encouragement of Edward Garnett.

There is, however, a slight shift in emphasis between his 20s and his 30s work. As Bates develops as a writer, he moves away from the stifled and dejected countryside individuals of the 20s to the spaces, places, and relations of the 30s, as the titles of his pieces indicate: from *The Two Sister* (1926), *Catherine Foster* (1929), 'The Idiot', 'A Comic Actor', 'Never', to *The Fallow Land* (1932), *Charlotte's Row* (1931), *The Poacher* (1935), *Spella Ho* (1938).⁹² This spatial and temporal change is also registered in his 30s *NSN* short stories, for example: 'Harvest Moon' (two children's imaginative play during harvest), 'Time' (a portrait of three 'timeless' old men horrified at the sight of a stopped watch), 'On the Road' (an erotic encounter in the woods between two

⁹⁰ Dean R. Baldwin, in his *H. E. Bates: A Literary Biography* (Selinsquare: Susquehanna University Press, 1987), quotes an unpublished letter of 3 January 1933 by Bates asking Garnett for 'some travel books and country books and flower books' to review (p. 106).

⁹¹ His essays are: 'Crime by Blossoms', *NSN*, 27 May 1933, pp. 684-5; H. E. Bates, 'A Kentish Portrait', *NSN*, 28 October 1933, pp. 513-4; 'The Lace-makers', *NSN*, 28 April 1934, pp. 637-8; H. E. Bates, 'A Midland Portrait', *NSN*, 7 July 1934, pp. 12-3; 'A Country Pub', *NSN*, 25 August 1934, pp. 237-8; 'Chelsea', *NSN*, 25 May 1935, pp. 749-50; 'The Other Chelsea', *NSN*, 23 May 1936, p. 802.

⁹² *Charlotte's Row* is about the impact of industrialisation on the countryside as experienced by a group of shoemakers; *The Fallow Land* spans the period between 1890 and 1920 in the life of a farming community; and *Spella Ho* is a fictive historical account of a house and the changes it undergoes between 1873 and 1931. A discussion of all these novels can be found in Baldwin's *Bates*.

tramps).⁹³ Critics have certainly noted the ‘atmospheric’ qualities of his fiction, what Dean R. Baldwin has described as ‘the intricate interplay of mood and scene in relation to character and plot’.⁹⁴ Indeed, Bates’s work certainly assumes a more generalised form in the 30s, which at times risks reducing humans to active figures in the landscape. A *NSN* piece like ‘A Kentish Portrait’, for example, though concerned with describing Alfred (the narrator’s new gardener), does employ a documentary generality: ‘He is in short very typical of his race and his kind. Indeed, he might be a caricature. But he exists in reality’.⁹⁵ The tone of typicality is strongly sounded here. Alfred is a type; and he is as a result less individuated, given less personal and more general characteristics in order to conform with the writer’s conception of a type. When compared with Pritchett, Bates’s *métier* as a writer becomes clearer. He is concerned with countryside types, with generalities of character, while Pritchett employs a different narrative strategy: seeking specificities within recognised and active social generalities (of class, region, profession). It is the aim of this section to argue that the tone of generality, typicality, and timelessness in Bates’s 30s fiction has its source in his growing engagement with the English rural tradition of W. H. Hudson and Edward Thomas.

This is made abundantly clear in Bates’s ‘The Gleaner’, his much admired *NSN* short story, described by the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer Geoffrey West as a

⁹³ H. E. Bates, ‘Harvest Moon’, *NSN*, 2 January 1934, pp. 84-5; ‘Time’, *NSN*, 20 August 1932, pp. 205-6; ‘On the Road’, *NSN* (Literary Supplement), 28 February 1931, pp. vii-x. ‘Time’ was chosen for *The Best British Short Stories of 1933*, and ‘On the Road’ for *The Best British Short Stories of 1931*. Bates was the British writer that appeared most in this annual anthology, publishing 10 pieces in all.

⁹⁴ Dean R. Baldwin, ‘Atmosphere in the Stories of H. E. Bates’, *Studies in Short Fiction*, 21 (Summer 1984), 215-22 (p. 216). For Bates’s rejection of plot for atmosphere and characterisation see his ‘Joseph Conrad and Thomas Hardy’, in *The English Novelists: A Survey of the Novel by Twenty Contemporary Novelists*, ed. by Derek Verschoyle (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936), pp. 229-44.

⁹⁵ Bates, ‘A Kentish Portrait’, p. 514.

‘superb little study’.⁹⁶ The story is written in a mourning, autumnal spirit. The old woman, whose every move, stare, and activity the narrator describes, is clearly a survivor of her race: ‘It is as though there is no one in the world except herself who gleanes any longer. She is not merely alone: she is the last of the gleaners, the last survivor of an ancient race’.⁹⁷ Paradoxically, she also ‘looks eternal’.

Nothing distracts her from her labour: ‘There is no time for looking or listening or resting. To glean, to fill her sack, to travel over that field before the light is lost; she has no other purpose than that and could understand none’. Her labour becomes her, and she does it so instinctually – moving ‘to some ancient and inborn system’ – that she comes to look like a bird: ‘In her black skirt and blouse, and with her sharp white head for ever near the earth, she looks like a hungry bird, always pecking and nipping at something, never resting, never satisfied’.

At the end, and as her eyes ‘fill with the stupid tears of age and weakness’, she lifts the sack over the gate and heads home: ‘She looks more than ever eternal, an earth-figure, as old and ageless and primitive as the corn she carries’ (p. 546). The closing sentence of the story elevates her further into a biblical symbol of patience, submissiveness, toil, and ultimate deservedness: ‘Her tears have dried on her cheeks, and now and then she can taste the salt of them still on her lips: the salt of her own body, the salt of the earth’ (p. 546).

⁹⁶ H. E. Bates, *The Poacher*, rev. by Geoffrey West, *TLS*, 24 January 1935, p. 45. West was a friend of Bates and an associate of his (with Edward J. O’Brien and others) on the editorial board of the pioneering and short-lived British journal of the short story *New Stories* (Feb-March 1934 – April-May 1936). For an informative bibliographical account of the magazine see Roy Simmonds, ‘Edward J. O’Brien and *New Stories*’, *London Magazine* 23 (November 1983), pp. 44-54. O’Brien, who was American, also edited (with Russian translator John Cournos) *The Best British and American Short Stories* from 1922 until his death in 1941.

⁹⁷ H. E. Bates, ‘The Gleaner’, *NSN*, 5 November 1932, pp. 545-6 (p. 545). Unless otherwise indicated, all references are from page 545. ‘The Gleaner’ was anthologised in *The Best British Short Stories 1934*.

In complete contrast to modernist solipsistic psychologism, Bates here emphasises externality and objectivity. His naturalist eye frames the gleaner in her environment and records her activity truthfully. The fact of rural labour is strongly registered. So far so good, and so Bates.⁹⁸ However, while Bates had previously been satisfied with 'realising' his characters (Garnett's phrase), here he goes a step further. The gleaner is objectified and made into a static, a-historical and religious icon. Thus, from a nameless representative of her kind, she comes to typify (even, to be reduced to) the instinctive act of labour itself, and ends up becoming a symbol of the blessed meek who shall inherit the earth. Bates leaves no room for the gleaner's own individuality, her subjective life, and the specificity of her being.

Such objective recording, though significant as a literary form for its realist content, risks objectification, a reduction of humans to objects. This way of looking and style of writing was prevalent in another form of writing which became very important for Bates in the 30s: English rural writing. In fact, both American naturalism and English ruralism are, with nineteenth-century Russian realism, major literary influences that shape Bates as a writer. In his autobiography he picks out the following four names for special mention: W. H. Hudson and Edward Thomas, Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway. The Americans he praises for their revolutionary pictorial and suggestive writing style and ordinary subject matter, which, with Russian realism, constituted formative influences for Bates. As Walter Allen argues, Bates was describing his own literary method in *The Modern Short Story* (1941) when he said the following about Stephen Crane's style, as that:

⁹⁸ Part of Bates's realism, though, was an interest in the psychology of his character, as my previous discussion of 'Never' and 'The Idiot' shows. He was a great admirer of Conrad after all.

‘by which a story is told not by the carefully engineered plot but by the implication of certain isolated incidents, by the capture and arrangement of casual episodic movements. It is the method by which the surface, however seemingly trivial or unimportant, is recorded in such a way as to interpret the individual emotional life below’.⁹⁹

Thus, on top of American naturalist technique, which remains a strong presence in his writing, is added English ruralism, of which Bates was later to say: ‘I owe the enrichment of my ability to put the English countryside down on paper’.¹⁰⁰ This ‘enrichment’ injects something new into his writing. The countryside as entity becomes a stronger object of representation than the subjects living in it, the environment overpowering. Bates comes to represent the countryside as a condition of existence hanging over and above its farmers, workers, gleaners, in short, its subjects. Conditions and atmosphere come to fill in for, substitute, and take over from the lived experience of people of the country. Or, put differently, countryside subjects become objects of the countryside.

As much is even admitted by a great admirer of Bates, Graham Greene, who had previously praised his ‘splendidly objective stories’ and said: ‘Mr Bates is supreme among English short-story writers; and the work of most authors beside his appears shoddy, trivial or emotional’. Greene even found it difficult to say whether Chekov or

⁹⁹ Walter Allen, *The Short Story in English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 262. Bates thought Crane was a pioneer. In his important ‘Stephen Crane: A Neglected Genius’, *The Bookman*, (October 1931), pp. 10-11, he praises his depiction of the ‘brutality of war’ and ‘ironical, remorseless, superbly detached’ (p. 10) style in *Red Badge of Courage* (1895) and his ‘tragic impressionism of New York slum life’ (p. 11) in his collection of short stories *The Open Boat* (1898).

¹⁰⁰ H. E. Bates, *The Blossoming World: An Autobiography*, 3 vols. (London: Michael Joseph, 1971), II, p. 99. He adds that ‘in the thirties, I must have read almost every word of Hudson and came away, as Galsworthy says, refreshed, stimulated, enlarged’. It is worth noting that Hudson was a friend of Edward Garnett, who published his *El Ombu* (1902) while reader at Duckworth as well as his *Letters from W. H. Hudson to Edward Garnett* (London: Dent, 1925) later on. Garnett admired Hudson’s honesty and casual style. He wrote a long article on him in the *Academy*, reprinted as ‘W. H. Hudson’s “Nature Books”’ in *Friday Nights: Literary Criticism and Appreciations* (London: Cape, 1922). Of *El Ombu* he made the following statement in a letter to R. B. Cunninghame Graham: ‘I have an excessive admiration for *El Ombu*. It remains in my memory as a masterpiece’ (George Jefferson, *Edward Garnett: A Life in Literature* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), p. 78). Garnett also admired Thomas and wrote his *DNB* entry in 1927.

Bates was ‘the finer artist’.¹⁰¹ Yet, two years later, in his review of *Something Short and Sweet* (1937), Greene is critical of Bates for allowing a heavy country environment to dominate over his fictive creations. ‘His people no longer stepped out of the story into the vast world of conjecture [and] [...] his characters are dominated and dwarfed by an undifferentiated sexuality’.¹⁰² In this new volume he: ‘turns off human beings with that air of routine from which his cows in calf, his fields of corn and laden fruit trees have sometimes suffered. Even Uncle Silas [Bates’s famous creation] is a little diminished in the heavy air’. Greene ends his review by saying that: ‘This is a collection which Mr. Bates’s admirers, of whom I am devoutly one, may prefer to forget’, making it clear that Bates is employing, or falling into, a way of writing that has constrained the real world of his fiction. This shift of emphasis and perspective can be explained by the growing intellectual impact of Hudson’s mythopoeic imagination on Bates.

English rural writing put pressure on Bates, and he had to read it, engage with it, and evaluate it. His judgement on it was positive, even when he criticised its sentimentalising of the country. Though he didn’t share its bourgeois fantasies and inventions, its magic and mysticism – there are no fairies or goddesses in Bates – he accepted those as complementary parts to the naturalist dimensions of the tradition – the meticulous observation and documentation of the ordinary. In his preface to Hudson’s romance *Green Mansions*, where the main protagonist (Rima) is a bird-woman, Bates describes this process of ‘interlac[ing] romance and reality’: ‘His vision and his genius are in fact two-fold: on the one hand intensely mystic, on the other capable of the fidelity

¹⁰¹ H. E. Bates, *Cut and Come Again*, rev. by Graham Greene, *The Spectator*, 22 November 1935, pp. 36-8 (p. 38).

¹⁰² H. E. Bates, *Something Short and Sweet*, rev. by Graham Greene, *The Spectator*, 6 August 1937, p. 252. Next two quotations are also from this piece.

of the trained and experienced naturalist to the matters and creatures of earth'.¹⁰³ The interlacing goes beyond fact and fiction. As much as mystic and poet act to complement naturalist in order to communicate 'the picture of the natural world',¹⁰⁴ so do observer and observed (man and nature) intermingle and become indistinguishable, become one, a union achieved by Hudson himself:

'The blue sky, the brown soil beneath, the grass, the trees, the animals, the wind, the rain, and the stars are never strange to me; for I am in, and of, and am one, with them; and my flesh and the soil are one, and the heat in my blood and in the sunshine are one, and the winds and the tempests and my passions are one. I feel the strangeness only with regard to my fellow-men.'¹⁰⁵

This is a pastoral vision of happiness, a mystical one-ness with nature that is quasi-religious. It is pre-urban, pre-industrial, even pre-Fall, what Hudson in *Nature in Downland* calls 'a communion with nature'.¹⁰⁶ There are no machines to disturb the harmonious unity here, no relations subjugating one man to the will of another. Humans are strange and unwelcome. Surprisingly, Hudson's petty-bourgeois idealism is endorsed by Bates when he comments: 'Perhaps it would do us no harm to try, for a change, living as Conrad rightly maintained Hudson wrote: "as the grass grows"'.¹⁰⁷ To live as naturally as the grass grows is to reduce man to a plant or a tree, to reduce human history to natural history, and to impose a natural process on the development of human society.

¹⁰³ H. E. Bates, 'Introduction', in *Green Mansions: A Romance of the Tropical Forest* (London: Collins, 1957), pp. 11-16, (p. 15). Bates ends his introduction by describing Hudson as 'the supreme nature writer in English literature' (p. 16).

¹⁰⁴ W. J. Keith, *The Rural Tradition* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1975), p. 181

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Bates, 'Introduction', *Green Mansions*, p. 12. Bates repeats this quote, though without the last sentence, in *The Blossoming World*, p. 100.

¹⁰⁶ For Hudson's imposition of quasi-religious imagery and themes on nature see Mervin Nicholson, 'What we see we feel': The Imaginative World of W. H. Hudson', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 47 (summer 1978), 304-22, (p. 307). Also relevant is David Miller, *W. H. Hudson and the Elusive Paradise* (London: Macmillan, 1990).

¹⁰⁷ Bates, *The Blossoming World*, p. 100.

Bates is able to endorse such an idealist vision, even though his fiction is worldly, materialist and realist, because he shares with English bourgeois ruralism a fundamental assumption about the history of humanity: industrialisation is a mistake and should be reversed.¹⁰⁸ Though it does have benefits in the form of new scientific inventions that make life in the countryside less difficult, it is fundamentally flawed.

This issue is tackled head on in 'The Machine', a (non-*NS*) short story first published in *John O' London's Weekly* (5 August 1938) and anthologised in *Under Thirty*.¹⁰⁹ It tells the story of Simmons (nicknamed Waddo), a factory worker who used to help on the narrator's farm when extra hands were needed at hay-time, harvest, and threshing. He is energetic and industrious, quick and efficient, and has no time to waste or hang about. He despises the farmers' antiquated tools and 'machineless world', giving them 'the look of a giant for a degenerate collection of pitch-fork pigmies' (p. 30).

Addressing them, he makes his views about their methods of work very clear:

'Call yourself bleedin' farmers, and ain't got a machine in place. No binder, no hay-turner, no root-cutter. No tater-riddle, no nothing. Blimey, spit on me big toe, spit on it. Ain't you up-to-date? Here you are scrattin' about like old hens scrattin' for daylight, when a couple o' machines'd bring you right bang-slap up with the times. Machines – that's what you want. Save yourself time and money. See! They do away with the men.' (p. 30)

As the narrator comments: 'The machine was his god', and: 'Coming from the machines, he was like a machine'. But he was more than that since he works, the narrator admiringly and proudly states, 'with a mastery and precise beauty that no machine could ever show' (p. 30).

¹⁰⁸ Garnett also thought so, as his preface to *The Two Sisters* discussed in an earlier chapter shows.

¹⁰⁹ *Under Thirty: An Anthology*, ed. by Michael Harrison (London: Rich & Cowan, 1939), pp. 29-36; Further references given after quotations in the text. This is a gem of an anthology since it includes samples of the work of 30 British writers under the age of thirty, with each short story preceded by an 'Autobiographical Note'.

One November day during the threshing season, Waddo was ‘feeding sheaves to the drum’ when the rats started running out of the stacks and the farmers started smashing them about.¹¹⁰ In the excitement and mayhem that ensued, Waddo slips into the machine and is killed by it: ‘There was no answer; and in a world that stood still we knew that the machine had claimed him’. Waddo’s fate is the industrial worker’s fate and is, by extension, the fate of industrial civilisation. The machine will claim humanity sooner or later, and to survive we have to return to the ‘mastery and precise beauty’ of pre-industrial labour.

This position is clearly stated in his ‘Why I Live in the Country’ piece published in *The Countryman* in the mid-30s. Here he says that the first sound he heard while growing up in Rushden beside a boot factory was ‘the monotonous moan and whine and thunder of machinery’.¹¹¹ Though machinery can be less noisy – like ‘the sound of a threshing machine, that constant rhythmical beat, a sound of soothing monotony’ – its sound represented for Bates the suffering of humanity under the yolk of the machine:

That sound became in fact a symbol: it came to represent for me the progress of industrial life, the *ascendancy of ugliness over beauty*, the assimilation by the town of the countryside. It was, though no one seemed to notice it, a sound of despair. It was not, as it seemed, the sound of a machine, but the cry of humanity itself in servitude to the machine. It was a cry I heard twenty-five years without ever getting used to it or indifferent to it: the sound for in fact which drove me at last to forsake the town for the country. (Italics added)

Machines and the sounds of small-town industrialisation sent him running away to the country. Together with the benefits of scientific inventions that transformed country life comes enslavement by machine, a price Bates is not willing to pay. In order to achieve Hudson’s one-ness and communion with nature humanity has to abandon the city and

¹¹⁰ According to the *OED*, a drum is: ‘The cylindrical beater of a thrashing-machine’.

reverse the process of industrialisation, return to a (mythical) time when man belonged to nature.¹¹²

No wonder the gleaner looks bird-like (Hudson's favourite animal), 'eternal', 'ageless', an 'earth-figure'. And no wonder Bates's lace-makers are eternal: 'The are eternal figures who have sat there through centuries of sunlight doing nothing but work on those eternal patterns of leaves and flowers'.¹¹³ And what about the old man in 'Time' who is generalised away with the following statement: 'He was patriarchal. He resembled a biblical prophet, bearded and white and immemorial. He was timeless'.¹¹⁴

These are some of the Hudsonian notes Bates strikes in his *NSN* pieces. Yet, thankfully, they are not the whole story, and Bates's realist preference for 'land' over 'earth' always gets re-affirmed, as the following distinction from *The Fallow Land* shows:

The land was something more than the earth; the earth was something vague, primitive, poetic; the land was a composite force of actual, living, everyday things, fields and beasts, seed-time and harvest, ploughing and harrowing, wind and weather; bitterness and struggle; the land was an opponent, a master.¹¹⁵

In the conflict of literary modes of representation, American Naturalism and Russian Realism are strong opponents; and there are other stories in the journal where the bourgeois rural tone and a-social perspective is absent, where the environment furnishes no more than a background to social events and situations. 'On the Road' (admired by Pritchett) is one such piece, where objectivity not objectification is the order of the

¹¹¹ H. E. Bates, 'Why I Live in the Country – 5', *The Countryman*, 12 (January 1936), pp. 494-9 (p. 494). The following two quotes are from pages 494 and 495, respectively.

¹¹² This is another version of what Williams in *The Country and the City* dubbed as the 'escalator', a process of mourning an older, now destroyed countryside that arguably leads back to Eden. In the 20s *NS*, such an ideal was sought in the Medieval period, as the work of R. M. Fox testifies.

¹¹³ Bates, 'The Lace-makers', p. 637.

¹¹⁴ Bates, 'Time', p. 205.

day.¹¹⁶ 'A Flower Piece' is another, presenting two competing versions of rural girlhood. Here, in keeping with his dictum to be faithful to everyday speech expressed in his essay 'The Novelist's Ear', and clearly demonstrated in the 'The Machine', here child speech is very realistically conveyed, a technique also used to great effect in 'Harvest Moon', another *NSN* short story.¹¹⁷ 'For the Dead' is yet another example where realism holds sway. It tells of the discomfort of two mourners at meeting each other in the cemetery and having to 'pretend wretchedness'.¹¹⁸ And finally, his last two *NSN* stories aren't even country related. 'The Waiting Room' resembles Pritchett's 'X-ray' in theme and anti-institutional emphasis: 'She [the nurse] was impersonal, a real ice-maiden, with her head high up and a touch-me-not expression frozen on her face'.¹¹⁹ And 'The Man who Loves Cats' is a portrait of a perverted Professor who has a feline demeanour; as he tells his female student: ' "Cats and women go together. They were made for the same thing – for petting and loving and stroking" '.¹²⁰

It is surely short stories like these that Scottish working-class writer Fred Urquhart had in mind when he praised Bates's realism and engagement with 'commonplace character and situations', adding that his fiction was of the utmost importance for the current class struggle in Britain. In his 'The Work of H. E. Bates'

¹¹⁵ H. E. Bates, *The Fallow Land*, p. 70, quoted in Glen Cavaliero, *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel 1900-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 200.

¹¹⁶ Pritchett included it in his *Turnstile One: A Literary Miscellany from the New Statesman and Nation* (London: Turnstile Press, 1948).

¹¹⁷ H. E. Bates, 'The Novelist's Ear', *Fortnightly*, 145 (March 1936), pp. 277-82. Bates agrees with American critics of the contemporary English novel when they say that the language it employs is 'stilted and lifeless' (p. 279). Arguing that American dialogue is far more realistic than its weak and 'synthetic' English counterpart, he clearly states that: 'The speech of everyday life is the novelist's raw material' (p. 279).

¹¹⁸ H. E. Bates, 'For the Dead', *NSN*, 30 December 1933, pp. 869-70 (p. 870).

¹¹⁹ H. E. Bates, 'The Waiting Room', *NSN*, 13 October 1934, pp. 469-70 (p. 469). Pritchett's 'X-ray', discussed earlier, was published in the journal two years earlier, on 30 July 1932.

¹²⁰ H. E. Bates, 'The Man who Loved Cats', *NSN*, 13 March 1937, pp. 406-7 (p. 406). This is the last piece Bates published in the *NSN*.

(1939), worth quoting from at some length, Urquhart attempts to convey the social significance of his writing and question the surprising neglect it has suffered at the hands of the admirers of Bloomsbury – the likes of John Lehmann who consistently refused to publish Bates in *New Writing*:

H. E. Bates writes mainly of the country, of the English farming and labouring classes; occasionally of the industrial workers in small manufacturing towns. In an article of this length I have not space to examine the social significance of his work, but it strikes me as curious that many left-wing theorists who laud the work of his upper-class intellectual contemporaries have not paid greater attention to it. If his books were given to people whom the Marxists wanted to convert, they would have much more effect than plays in blank verse about mother-complexes and pseudo-homosexuality. An ordinary working man or woman would understand and appreciate the difficulties of Bates's young farm-girls and stolid labourers much better than they would understand the spiritual hunger of the inhabitants of Bloomsbury. Two of his best novels, *The Fallow Land* and *The Poacher*, depict phases of English country life, knowledge of which is vital in the present class-struggle: the decay of the countryside and the industrialisation of the land.¹²¹

At the heart of the Batesian literary project is a commitment to ordinary rural life.

Though anti-industrial and at times Hudsonian, his fiction unceremoniously re-affirms that the countryside is a legitimate object of realist fictive concerns. In this, he breaks with bourgeois Georgianism and challenges its patriotic myth of a timeless rural England.

¹²¹ Fred Urquhart, 'The Work of H. E. Bates', *Life and Letters Today*, 23 (December 1939), pp. 289-93 (pp. 291-2).

Chapter 7

Conclusion: Fiction of Petty-Bourgeois Ordinarity

I believe that Marxist criticism has not only underestimated the relevance of mass culture in our century, but has been blind to its systematic connection with avant-garde experiences. If the study of Modernism is to be a study of modern culture and its role in history – and not just of a chosen section of it – it will have to realize that the silence of Modernism is as meaningful as its words, and that it has been covered by other, quite different voices.¹

Whereas before 1914 the English had been apt to praise themselves for abundant energy and will, it now turned out that they were really, at heart, a race of loveable eccentrics, not a military people at all, nor yet intrepid explorers.²

Perhaps in literary history we need a concept of the suburban or of modern domestic design like that which proved so fruitful in studies of the visual arts and architecture.³

As Raphael Samuel has argued, 'British Society between the two world wars was peculiarly inward-looking'. In politics and economics, Macdonald's and Baldwin's isolationist, protectionist, and conservative 'Little Englandism' was dominant. In culture: 'A vast amount of attention was lavished on the beauties of national character: the alleged tolerance of the English; their kindness to others; their extreme modesty; their love of sportsmanship'.⁴ From Priestley's and Orwell's gentle, private nation of gardeners to Sir Ernest Barker's conception of the English preference for 'muddling through', the English

¹ Franco Moretti, 'The Spell of Indecision', *New Left Review* 164 (July-August 1987), 27-33 (p. 33).

² Raphael Samuel, 'Empire Stories: The Imperial and the Domestic', in *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain*, ed. by Alison Light, Sally Alexander, and Gareth Stedman Jones, *Theatres of Memory*, II (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 74-97 (p. 82).

³ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 216-7.

self-image turned domestic after 1914. It celebrated the ordinariness of everyday life rather than the heroism and adventure of empire.

This shift from outwards to inwards is also common to modernism. In Virginia Woolf's *oeuvre*, it can be traced from the journeying abroad of *Night and Day* in 1913 to the English pageant of *Between the Acts* in 1941. In fact *ordinariness* is a central feature of modernism, as Woolf herself reminds us in 'Modern Fiction': 'Examine for a moment an *ordinary* mind on an *ordinary* day'.⁵ The modernist emphasis falls on the mind and the private. As Franco Moretti has put it: 'the meaning of life is no longer sought in the realm of public life, politics and work; it has migrated into the world of consumption and private life [...] What is really meaningful is not what happens – the logic of events and decisions – but unmotivated, "free" subjective reactions to it'.⁶ Woolf is interested in subjectivity, consciousness, and *things in themselves*, as she states in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown': an art 'complete in itself', 'self-contained'; an interest in 'things in themselves; in character in itself; in the book in itself'.⁷ Self-contained, autonomous forms is what Woolf is after. As is Stella Benson, which is clearly stated in her angst-ridden pursuit of originals in the *NS* piece 'More Dreams'. Both of them aim for (to

⁴ Raphael Samuel, 'Introduction: Exciting to Be English', in *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, ed. by Raphael Samuel, 3 vols (London: Routledge, 1989), II, xviii-lxvii (p. xxii, p. xxiv).

⁵ *The Common Reader: First Series* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925), 146-54 (p. 149). This explains Woolf's fascination with 'Trivia' by L. Pearsall Smith, one of the *NS*'s wartime introductions (see, for example, 31 July 1915, pp. 399-400); his contributions to the journal seem barely to have survived the war. In her review of his collection, *Trivia*, entitled 'Moments of Being' (*Contemporary Writers* (London: Hogarth Press, 1965), pp. 74-76), she admires his ability to capture what he calls the "whimsical and perilous charm of daily life" (p. 76) and emphasises the pleasure that such an 'ironic but affectionate detachment' (p. 75) gives her: 'It has no mission, it contains no information, unless you can dignify with that name the thoughts that come into the head, buzz through it, and go out again without improving the thinker or adding to the wealth of the world (p. 74).

⁶ Moretti, 'The Spell of Indecision', p. 32.

⁷ *A Woman's Essays: Selected Essays*, ed. by Rachel Bowlby, 2 vols (London: Penguin, 1992), I, 69-87 (p. 77).

borrow from Eagleton) ‘mysteriously autotelic objects[s], free of all contaminating truck with the real’.⁸

If modernism is a concern with artistic forms in themselves, realism is a concern with artistic forms in their connection and relation with other (social and political) forms. For realism’s potential contribution to changing the world (what Woolf describes as the ‘feeling of incompleteness and dissatisfaction’ which makes it necessary for the reader ‘to do something’⁹), modernism substitutes its ‘basic political indifference’ (as Moretti put it). Meaning, truth, and art are subjective and autonomous. As I argued earlier, Stella Benson’s *NS* writings exemplify this stylistic, cultural mutation. By and large, however, *NS* fiction between 1913 and 1939 is a rejection of these claims. By its commitment to everyday, material reality, it takes up the challenge of modernism by developing and reconstructing realism *away* from ‘the distorting presence of Victorian moralism’¹⁰ and *towards* actuality, essence, objectivity (thus rejecting the atomising and relativizing of perspectives), and the real.¹¹ In this context, the main contribution of *NS* fiction lies in extending these new realist concerns to a hitherto neglected sphere of life: petty-bourgeois ordinariness and lived experience.

⁸ Terry Eagleton, ‘Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism’, *New Left Review*, 152 (July-August 1985), 60-73 (p. 67).

⁹ Woolf, ‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’, p. 77.

¹⁰ Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914* (London: Fontana Press, 1991), p. 288. Also relevant to understanding the contradictory cultural impulses of the 1890s and responses to Victorian realism is: Terry Eagleton, ‘The Flight to the Real’, in *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 11-21.

¹¹ As H. E. Bates put it in his preface to *Country Tales: The Collected Short Stories* (London: Readers’ Union, 1938), pp. 7-10: ‘They [readers] are similarly not asked to accept a philosophy, a point of view, a creed, a moral, a sermon on good and evil. The best I can hope is that they will read these stories with something of the spirit in which they were written: for pleasure, and out of a passionate interest in human lives’ (p. 10). Bates here also emphasises his shift from his early subjective, impressionist portraits, where mood was more important than character, ‘to a wider, harder, more objective world in which character was of greater importance’ (p. 8).

NS fiction is a testimony to the resilience of realism and representationalism, even after the challenge of modernism and formalism. From 1913 to 1939, ordinary, everyday, commonplace reality preoccupies *NS* fiction. With its contradictory origins in both mythical Georgianism and urban social exploration (romantic ruralism and slum fiction), it registers the literary importance of social conditions: destitution, poverty, altruistic philanthropy, unemployment, malnutrition, factory work, and machinofacture. The (threatened) bliss and beauty of the countryside is contrasted with the grimness and conflict of urban life. City life is also suburban life, and clerks, their circumstances and dreams, also play a role in the early fiction. This early concern with the petty bourgeois is indeed a growing trend, slowly evolving in the interwar years to reach a dominant position in *NS* fiction in the 30s. In fact, if collectivisation is the political expression of the new petty bourgeois of monopoly capitalism, much of *NS* fiction in this period can be read as the cultural expression of this class, defined by its structurally contradictory location in the class structure. Looking simultaneously upwards towards the bourgeoisie and downwards towards the proletariat, the petty bourgeois is characterised by insecurity, political dependence, and, as Lenin put it in 'Left-Wing Communism' (1920), 'alternate moods of exaltation and dejection'.¹² It is usually seen as politically reactionary, nationalist, and with an 'inner core of conservatism'; and this has certainly been true historically. Arnold Bennett (especially late, as shown during the Strike of 1926) and E. R. Morrough are certainly examples of petty-bourgeois counter-revolutionism in the *NS*. The conservative side of this class, of what Woolf denigratingly dubbed the

¹² Quoted in Arno J. Mayer, 'The Lower Middle Class as Historical Problem', *Journal of Modern History*, 47 (September 1975), 409-36 (p. 421). Next quote is from p. 436. As Samuel has argued, the interwar middle class felt besieged: 'Suburbs Under Siege: The Middle Class Between the Wars, Part III', *New Socialist* (May-June 1983), pp. 28-30.

‘middlebrows’, the ‘betwixt and between’ class which should be exterminated to preserve the social harmony between highbrows and lowbrows,¹³ has been delineated in Alison Light’s excellent *Forever England*: private, patriotic, and conservatively modern.

There is, however, yet another story to be told about this class, one of progressive public engagement and radical commitment to democracy and anti-imperialism going back to the 1890s (Boer War) or even, in some accounts, to the early nineteenth century.¹⁴ A story of potential political progressiveness is indeed recounted by Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.¹⁵ In fact, as Ross McKibbin has argued, Light’s version ‘exaggerates middle-class retreat from politics by under-rating the degree to which the literature of modernity was also a literature of public life’.¹⁶ Such public engagement can be found in Priestley’s *Angel Pavement*, with its criticism of capitalist insecurity; in Winifred Holtby’s *South Riding*, with its engagement with local politics; and in Ellen Wilkinson’s *Clash*, with its commitment to working-class solidarity. It can take a nationalist bent, exemplified in Priestley’s comments on patriotism in *English Journey*:

I thought about patriotism. I wished I had been born early enough to have been called a Little Englander. It was a term of sneering abuse, but I should be delighted to accept it as a description of myself. That *little* sounds the right note of affection. It is little England I love. And I considered how much I disliked Big

¹³ Virginia Woolf, ‘Middlebrow’, in *The Death of the Moth* (London: Hogarth, 1943), pp. 113-119.

¹⁴ Raphael Samuel’s *Patriotism* has two relevant essays on this topic, discussing figures like William Cobbett, Richard Cobden, and J. A. Hobson: Richard Gott, ‘Little Eanglanders’, pp. 90-102; and E. Green and M. Taylor ‘Further Thoughts on Little Englandism’, pp. 103-109.

¹⁵ See ‘Jonathan M. Wiener, ‘Marxism and the Lower Middle Class: A Response to Arno Mayer’, *Journal of Modern History*, 47 (December 1976), 666-71. Wiener argues that: ‘Nowhere in this discussion does Marx describe the lower middle class as a natural or inevitable ally of counterrevolution’ (p. 668). For a similar political assessment of the progressive potentialities of the petty bourgeois due to their contradictory objective location in the class structure, see Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1978), especially pp. 287-331.

¹⁶ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 484.

Englanders, whom I saw as red-faced, staring loud-voiced fellows, wanting to go and boss everybody about all over the world...¹⁷

And it can take a socialist one, as with Pritchett, who was too much aware of the contradictions and antagonisms that constitute modern societies to be a nationalist: 'I felt I ought in some way to unself myself and to become a foreigner, and that was always important to me'.¹⁸ Looking at England through foreign (not patriotic) eyes would, he suggests, enable a process of real self-recognition and self-criticism.

From the late 20s onwards, *NS* fiction is indeed a tribute to that radical potential. Petty-bourgeois socialist writers like Bates, Pritchett, and Zoshchenko manage to withstand the bourgeois onslaught of modernism. In both politics and culture, they look downwards, and manage to resist the fragmentation of subjectivity, the overpowering of the signified by the signifier, and the relativizing of common meaning. Their fiction is defined by a combination of formal experimentation and a commitment to representationalism. Rejecting Victorian moralism and didacticism, Pritchett, for example, prefers narrative irresolution and open-endedness, while celebrating what Martin Amis has called 'peculiar ordinariness'. Zoshchenko's *skaz* is utilised to express the voice of petty-bourgeois fellow-travellers, their everyday life and speech: a formalist device is here used to bring into focus everyday post-revolutionary Russian realities. The commitment to commonplace speech is also registered in Bates, who tries to keep to objectivity and truth in expression. At his best, his countryside becomes an arena of struggle, conflict, and social change. Mixing formal innovation and suburbia is the

¹⁷ J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London: Heinemann, 1934; repr. London: Mandarin, 1994), p. 416. Parts of this are also quoted in Samuel's *Patriotism*.

¹⁸ *Novelists in Interview*, ed. by John Haffenden (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 210-30, (p. 217).

hallmark of even bourgeois Peter Chamberlain, who uses montage to bring out the experiential diversity of (usually) uniform suburban existence.

Ordinariness and formal innovation certainly go hand in hand in the *NS*, where the unsung heroes of a reconstructed British realism can be found. J. B. Priestley and Winifred Holtby belong here as well, both charting everyday provincial life and believing (as Holtby said of Woolf's work) that modernism is 'slight in texture and limited in scope': 'The immense detailed knowledge of the material circumstances of life mastered by Thackeray or Arnold Bennett is beyond her'.¹⁹ As Priestley put it in a letter to Hugh Walpole in 1928: 'Jane says that provincial life – working and lower middle class stuff, industrial not rural – is my métier obviously and she's probably right [...] And one of the weaknesses of fiction today is that most of the novelists who can write have not an extensive acquaintance with the people and life of this country'.²⁰ Which is very similar to Pritchett's statement about the petty bourgeois: 'My own roots are in this class and I know it like the palm of my hand' (Autobiography, 400).

In conclusion, the values expressed here have little in common with bourgeois 'going over' and documentary realism. And the social positionality of writers is different. As with R. M. Fox, they are of the class, writing to express that class and make it understood. As Pritchett makes clear: 'It is part of the function of the novelist to speak for people, to make them say or reveal what they are unable to say, to give them a dignity' (Autobiography, p. 233). Which is artistic commitment *par excellence*, described by Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* as a social relation defined by 'choice of

¹⁹ Winifred Holtby, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Wishart, 1932), p. 202, p. 200.

²⁰ Quoted in Judith Cook, *Priestley* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), p. 94.

position' and 'conscious alignment'.²¹ It is in V. S. Pritchett and his strong commitment to the humanity, dignity, and restless modernity of the English petty bourgeoisie that the *NS* has its best interwar cultural representative.

²¹ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 200, p. 204.

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