Factions and Class Fictions:

Investigating Narratives of Resistance
in Representations of Lower-Class Men in Post-War British
Literature in
the New Wave & Thatcherite Years

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If I'm Ever to Find These Trees Meaningful I Must Have You by
the Thighs:
A Collection of Poems

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in English and Creative Writing

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis combines an academic investigation and creative writing practice in an attempt to understand the politics at work within mainstream notions of working-class masculine identity, and the role of literature in these discourses. Beginning with an academic analysis, the formulations and intersection of class and masculinity are outlined, explicating how systems, implemented by the middle-class creation of values, form social narratives whereby men of certain settings with associative lifestyles and practices, are privileged over other less valued groups of men. In this respect, its concerns are primarily with the socio-symbolic. Locating this discourse within an Aristotelian dichotomy of the mind and the body, this theoretical position is then applied in the scrutiny of six mainstream fictional narratives of two historic periods, each originally held to be politically subversive. In calling to question the validity of these original claims, further questions are raised regarding the nature of the mainstream fictional narrative at large, and whether it is an effective way of representing the politics of working-class identity, or whether, by its nature, it serves to reproduce its working-class characters as fixed subjects, immovable from their positions in a stable class system.

This line of inquiry is then further explored in the deconstruction of my own creative work, in which I initially sought to represent the concerns of my own working-class heritage. The resulting issues raised with respect to mainstream, linear narrative leading to the investigation of other potential forms of representation for the working-class male, culminating in the exploration of my own shifting identity in a non-linear, multi-directional collection of poetry.

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Introduction

Some Waynes

Magic Wayne with flowers; Wanye West; Box-of-Tricks Wayne; Wayne, proving he loves his daughter; the sporty Wayne – loves himself skinny; Bald Wayne, head like a rocking chair; Amy Waynehouse; A-Parody-of-Himself Wayne; Wayne the ironic; Fat Wayne – tits pushed beneath a Fred Perry Wayne; Wayne from Swindon; Ugly Wayne – the unlikely mess of his wife Wayne – canned laughter; Wayne from near Slough; Wayne who renamed another Wayne fleabag; Track-suited Wayne – your hubcaps, his pockets; Home and A-Wayne; Randy Wayne; Wayne, fountains of him, every drop snug to someone's mum; Wayne: trucker cap-wearer; Wayne, boyfriend of Stacey; Wayne-ker; Wayne the rap star, gold teeth, crime; Wayne the Superhero Wayne the Cowboy; Dancing Wayne – homosexual in tights; It's-Wayning-Men; a cavalcade of Waynes fucking each other up in a Geoff Hattersley poem – in a pub, in Barnsley; Purple Wayne; Wayne's World Wayne, Wayne 'Sleng Teng' Smith; A Wayne in a Manger; Wayne the dentist's nightmare; Wayne the Eastender: all of them have stopped what they're doing, all of them divided in two rows and facing each other, all of them, arms raised, they are linking fingers, all of them: an architrave through which I celebrate, marching like I am the bridegroom, grinning like I am the bride

(Holloway-Smith, Unpublished, 2014)

In July 2010, I had completed my Master's degree in Creative Writing: the Novel, and had just been notified that I had won funding to undertake a Ph.D. I was also on the cusp of having my first short collection of poetry published. Weeks earlier, I had witnessed the birth of my daughter. With the political backdrop of the Conservative election victory still looming large, I had cause to reflect upon my own background, my first seventeen years (an entire childhood) lived with my working-class parents under a Tory government, and how my adult identity was beginning to contrast heavily to that of my own father, a builder from Swindon. It was becoming clear that the way my socio-economic self was understood was rapidly changing and would look starkly different from that which I recognised. Most of my friends, for example, had labeled me as an MA graduate, a graduate into the middle-classes.

As a result of my uneasy relationship with this ostensibly new identity, my Master's dissertation had already begun to respond, through my own creation of a fictional protagonist, to social attitudes surrounding white working-class masculinity. The emergence of several fictional characters in contemporary popular media, such as those in *Little Britain* and *Shameless* appeared to me to be indicative of a much deeper social discourse, focused upon poking fun at a group with whom I would have identified in my youth (recently renamed the Chav), and at whom I, within the narrative of my newly emerging social status, was invited to laugh. As Owen Jones has noted, there seemed to be a peculiar language through which the political correctness of the middle-classes did not apply when discriminating against this specific demographic, and this merited further investigation (CHAVS; 1). Having had my extended piece of fiction (produced for my aforementioned MA dissertation) shortlisted for a prize, I planned to employ the period of study afforded by my Ph.D to extend this topic so as to investigate it theoretically, having not had the opportunity to do so during my academic pursuits thus far in Creative Writing.

I was intrigued by the novels of the fifties and the Thatcherite years, two periods of political interest, which appeared to house a sum of lower-class protagonists (present in some of my favourite books) who had captured the mainstream imagination,[1] and I hoped they might be proven to voice some authentic representation of class conflict (however, I later came to question this). In critically exploring the famous protagonists of Keith Waterhouse, John Braine and Alan Sillitoe of the British New Wave, and Martin Amis, Irvine Welsh and John King of the era of the late eighties and early nineties, I anticipated valuable insights which could be then applied in the continuation of my own creative project, written in tandem with this research. The perhaps surprising culmination of these simultaneous projects is presented below in two parts.

In the theoretical inquiry presented in Part One, I began by looking into two of the most prominent philosophers with respect to class, Marx and Weber. The exploration of these

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[1] It is worth noting here, that all of the novels which I have chosen from these periods have received treatment by the mediums of film or television, or both.

[2] The conspicuous absence of women in these estates will be addressed in Chapter Two

[3] An interesting analysis of the problem of 'Self Ownership' is outlined by G. A. Cohen in chapter 9

theorists (as set out in Chapter One) led me to the work of Pierre Bourdieu whose critical insight into a symbolic economy, alongside those writing in response to his observations, began to bring up significant questions within my own work. The application of socio-economic insights expressed by these class theorists were then explored in relation to the construction of masculine identities (in Chapter Two), investigated with respect to the work of leading theorists in the field, such as Raewyn Connell, Michael Kimmel and Collinson and Hearn. This proved invaluable in developing an intersectional reading of society whereby individual and groups of males from particular demographics are understood differently. This perspective afforded interesting insights with respect to a social framework permeating all rungs of society, through which each individual and group are conceptualised and conceptualise themselves. The investigation of this framework then provided a position from which the fictional protagonists of three novels from the fifties and three from the eighties could then by scrutinized.

As this thesis took shape, the questions which had manifest early on became more pronounced, both in an understanding of my own changing subject position and of my creative practice, and how I came to recognise the politics of their crossover. As a result, in Part Two, I subject my own initial creative project to the same analysis as the other fictional representations analysed here, proving it, perhaps, to be not as much of a step forward as I had initially hoped. As a result, I necessarily began to ask whether there might be a more appropriate means of engaging with the subject matter raised in Part One of my thesis, of representations of working-class masculinity in general, and more locally my own position as a social agent. These critical examinations of both the fictional narratives of other authors and my own work-in-progress directed me to the influential critical humanist readings of Liz Stanley and Kenneth Plummer, whose work suggested other interesting directions and creative approaches for my project. In having examined my initial creative piece critically, and also having begun to re-conceptualise my own life trajectory – particularly in the occasion of this Ph.D, I had already, to an extent, become a primary text up for scrutiny. Thus, influenced by the insights of Stanley and Plummer, I saw the

potential to situate myself as a principal alternative representation of working-class masculinity. To produce this thesis in a manner in which I was scrutinizing myself, and reading my participation in its process as a major part of the current constitution of my subjectivity, would enable an analysis of contemporary social discourses at work in constructing social identity. Accordingly, I finally decided to enact this process in the production of a collection of poems.

The practice of producing this thesis, both academic and creative, can be seen, then, as a critical examination of the politics behind the popular representations of working-class masculinity. Its theoretical position attempts to question received notions and social assumptions produced and reproduced in relation to socio-economic and symbolic discourses outlined by theorists cited in this work. It endeavours to raise questions with respect to the role literature has played and continues to play in presenting the meanings these discourses inscribe onto social beings, and the implications of this. Moreover, it can be read as an attempt to interrogate, both critically and creatively, my own subject position, delineating the shifting nature of my identity, in order to ask how I am able to read my recent trajectory couched, as it is, in the social and economic discourses this thesis have highlighted, and how I chose to respond in negotiating that identity as a writer.

Part One: Investigating Narratives of Resistance in Representations of Lower-Class Men in Post-War British Literature: The New Wave & Thatcherite Years

Introduction

In March 2014, Peter Brant, head of policy at the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, was the subject of an article by the *Telegraph*, under the headline 'Working class children must learn to be middle class to get on in life.' His account suggests that 'the lack of effective networks and advice to help navigate this new alien "middle class world"' makes it more difficult for children from this "lower-class" group to succeed' (quoted in Graham). To some extent his 'middle-class world' aligns itself with Blair's infamous proclamation towards the end of his prime ministerial administration, that 'we're all middle-class now' (quoted in O'Hagan). Though, somewhat paradoxically, it makes the assertion that some of us need to be taught how to behave in this 'classed' manner, and at an early age. This discrepancy highlights the particular interests of this project's investigation. That a large portion of the population has to *learn* to be middle-class denotes that this middle-class world, as government officials would have it, is not entirely middle-class. But that the British middle-class has generated a discourse through which its own distinguishing features are normalized, and presented as the condition to which all social beings must aspire. Furthermore, its number is perceived as a socially successful people, valued highly enough to receive rewards such as well-paying jobs, certain social prestige and places of esteem within British society. The questions posed then with respect to a language whereby a particular portion of British society is able to represent itself as the whole – a norm, to which others have to work to be admitted, are ones with which this paper attempts to contend. How, for example, does a portion of society attain enough power to assert its agenda over others? And how is this power able to be justified, and, in part at least, ostensibly taken on by those others? Further questions are raised here with regard to this power and its use in the creation of working-class subjects, particularly male, and moreover, to what extent these lower class subjects are ever able to become recognised as valuable, and permitted socially mobility, or at least its associative rewards. These questions are contended with

through an analysis of representations of the male working-class body and the role of literature in these representations.

This first part of this thesis delineates the academic project through which an understanding is advanced. Taking as its starting point the inherent socio-politics at play within the language used to represent social subjects and practices (illustrated above), the following sections attempt to map an understanding of this production. Chapter One establishes a dialogue between ideas of Marx, Weber and Bourdieu, to produce a framework whereby the representation of class can be understood as presenting a dominant discourse through which social subjects are perceived and perceive themselves. In reflecting upon and establishing patterns between the works of the aforementioned social commentators, a particular strain is explored whereby economic and symbolic exchange values combine to construct perspectives that to some extent are accepted and embodied by both those who directly benefit from this representation and those who do not. Chapter Two will then build a constructivist approach to masculinity, through employing this economic and symbolic analysis to first investigate the manner through which dominant forms of masculinity take place, and second, the ways in which these are intrinsically implicated in the class debate. The analyses in these two sections will then be used in the next section to elucidate a further perspective, which utilizes helpful insights from Beverley Skeggs and Samantha Lyle, to argue for a system of socio-political representation through which the following sections can scrutinize the trajectories of fictional protagonists in two periods of British literature. These will begin through the work of Butler and Jameson to explore traditional literary conventions within which successful characterisation must take place. Reading these alongside the perspectives outlined in the previous sections, an understanding will be posited of the role these play in the production of existing of working-class male protagonists. Having done this, it will provide a definition of distinguishing properties each protagonist must possess in order for a conventional narrative to be workable, raising questions with respect to the inherent politics of social distinction which

occur within these representations. Following this, the next two chapters will discuss the implications with respect to three characters first in the era of the British New Wave, then during Thatcher's neo-liberalist era (whose politics arguably continue today), developing a narrative of politics between texts in each period, and ultimately the different literary periods in question. This is to examine whether the representations of working-class men have in fact changed or whether it is merely our perspective, shepherded by the class politics of each period. With this in mind, an attempt will be made to draw conclusions regarding particular agendas served within these conventions of representation.

Section 1

Chapter 1. Classifying Class Distinctions

Recent times have seen a renewal of interest in class, evidenced by accelerating social inequality. In spite of claims made by Thatcher and Blair that we now inhabit a classless Britain, sociologist Mike Savage asserts that we have in fact 'seen the reworking and consolidation of new kinds of class inequality,' and accordingly highlights the need for its recognition 'in the politics of austerity which characterise our times' ('Concerned about the BBC'S Class Calculator?'). Even a cursory glance at contemporary political issues highlights a clear tension between the banker (Wilson), demonized for his immoral bonuses (Savage, 'A New Model'), the benefit cuts (Grice) for those labeled parasitic on society (Asthana), and the correlative effects of the rise in the cost of living ('Poor Suffer'). Responses to this tension can be seen in both the Occupy Movement (see http://www.occupytogether.org), and in the explosion of conflict manifest in the 2011 London Riots ('England Rioters'). Two events which, as Joe Bennett asserts, have a 'material class-base', rooting them in an inequality exacerbated by the politics surrounding the recent banking crisis (Bennett, 'Moralising Class'), and inequality found in ratios of income, in which the average of the richest 10 per cent to that of the poorest 10 per cent is almost 12:1 (Ray, 2014, 117). Accordingly, they can be read as the lower-classes, re-emerging out of the latest barrage of political rhetoric, to publicly challenge the symbolic violence inflicted upon them, and the attempt to hide their existence. It is apparent, then, that this disparity between the reality and the rhetoric requires some further conceptualisation, because, as Savage observes, 'we need a way of connecting accentuating economic inequalities to social and cultural differences which permeate our society' ('Concerned about the BBC's Class Calculator?').

In an effort to better understand these economic inequalities, the BBC worked with Savage and a team of 'sociologists from leading universities' ('The Great British Class Survey') to produce a new framework of class categorisations. Through actioning the 'largest survey of social class ever conducted in the UK,' this team sought to establish a quantitative

response to Pierre Bourdieu's assertion of the need to analyse class outside of a purely economic model (Savage et al, 'A New Model'). In April 2013, an article loosely outlining the methods and findings of this recent research was published on the BBC's website, which details the employment of two surveys in tandem, in order to maximize the potential for accuracy in representing all facets of society ('The Great British Class Survey'). A new class model made up of seven categories was constructed. In line with Bourdieu, surveyors asked members of the public specific questions regarding 'their income and the value of their home and savings, which together is known as "economic capital"; their cultural interests and activities, known as "cultural capital"; and the number and status of people they know, which is called "social capital".' This article (ibid) provided a link to the findings and an in depth paper presented at the conference of the British Sociological Association (Savage et al, 'A New Model').

The attempt to redefine the divisions in British society provides a strong point of entry for the subject matter of this thesis. Its key area of interest is the representation of social groups, how identities come to be inscribed upon these groups, and the impact these inscriptions generate. The assertion that new modes of representing these divisions are needed by Savage et al is an interesting proposition, and one based on a history of thought. In framing the position of this thesis, a trajectory of division between higher and lower social groups, with attention to three major theorists will be traced. The ideas of Marx, Weber and the aforementioned Bourdieu will be outlined and compared, in order to draw a framework through which the latter part of this thesis can be progressed.

Mind over Body

Gary Day defines 'class' in its wider terms as a vehicle for measuring divisions in society. His introduction to *Class* (2001) places his assertion in a range of historical examples which

demonstrate how divisions were actualized through classifying categories. Ancient Greece is a particularly foundational illustration. Citizens, residential foreigners and slaves, Day says, made up a tri-layered social structure, which was viewed as 'the expression of *finely balanced society* where everyone knew their place [italics mine]' (3). In locating his argument within this social discourse at the 'dawn of civilization', he adds weight to Rosemary Crompton's assertion that, 'no persisting structure of economic and social inequality has existed in the absence of meaning system(s) which […] justify the unequal distribution of societal resources' (9). At the root of the social discourse of Ancient Greece, as Day asserts, was the distinguishing properties attributed to either side of the social cleft proposed by Aristotle, who advanced that 'the [citizens] were ruled by their minds and the [slaves] by their bodies' (Day 3). Unmistakably, this mind/body dualism is a telling one indeed, and one which has left its mark on everything that follows. This distinction which is used to qualify social inequality will be explored throughout this thesis.

Day's depiction of the lineage of classification employed throughout a large amount of history contains similarities to the view expressed by Aristotle. In addition to Ancient Greece, the Roman era, Day observes, saw the emergence of classifying practices, first in terms of organised property classes under Servius Tullius, which housed a divide between aristocrats and commoners, then, importantly, at the Christian conversion of Constantine, an estate model. The latter dominated Europe from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment (Day 3-4), and, as Day describes, was constructed of three estates: 'the clergy, whose business was with prayer […]; the warriors [or knights], who defended the land [...]; and the labourers who supported the other two' (19). [2] This is an observation underscored by Crompton's assertion of a 'hierarchal society' dominated by 'ecclesiastical and secular lords' (10). The nature of division, though couched in religious terms, can still be read through the lens of the Aristotelian mind/body dualism. The priest – with his lofty matters - was held in highest esteem. The knight, also,

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[2] The conspicuous absence of women in these estates will be addressed in Chapter Two

enjoyed lordship over land and over labourer (Day 20). Consequently, it was the graft of the labourer, and the division, therefore, in practices, between mind and body that enabled the identities of the higher placed, and thus sustained the division. What is of additional interest is that the perceived value of each social participant, based on how the subject sustains himself, appears to define his whole being, and precludes any potential for agency outside of the definition. As with the Aristotelian assertion, the subsequent 'mind versus body' discourses, privilege the former as the superior form, and the resultant behaviour is firmly rooted in economic circumstances. That the serf is poor and must work the land positions him solely as a body, his value is equated to the menial task which any body could perform, and thus his importance is not as great as one whose social role requires skill or specific knowledge. These illustrations are important in that they provide an historical context for economic divisions which both employ and reproduce how the body is used, particularly in definition of the lower class subject.

As both Day (26-27) and Crompton (10-11) chart, the rise of capitalist industrialism from the seventeenth century brought about severe changes to the way society both operated and saw itself. Day focuses on the shift in exchange relations and technological advances, the result of which, he says, a more diverse market emerged and brought with it new trades that expanded beyond the confines of the feudal state (26-27). Crompton, meanwhile, outlines the questions these changes raised about economic inequality, now that new technology and logic rendered the former religious qualification of distribution of wealth outdated. She writes, 'in direct opposition to the idea that human beings are naturally or divinely unequal at birth […] there developed […] the argument that, by virtue of their humanity, all human beings were born *equal* [original emphasis]' (10). What both writers highlight is that the discourse of the individual was created within this process, and within this discourse the notion of self-

ownership.[3] The profound effects of the emergence of the individual can be read as having, in turn, produced the trajectory of ambition and self-improvement through which the bourgeoisie first became visible (Day 48) and, on the other hand – through corrosion of customary rights in trade and manufacture (Crompton 11), the 'free individual' or the landless labourer. It is the tension between these two groups of 'individuals', whom he termed the 'Bourgeoisie' and the 'Proletariat', which Marx read as the distinguishing feature of the capitalist era.

Marx: The Production of the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat

For Marx, as Giddens notes, 'classes are constituted by the relationship of groups of individuals to the ownership of private property in the means of production' (37). This, he says, produces a cleft societal structure, in which one weaker group is always subservient to the other, stronger group (37). Put another way, it is the section of society which emerged triumphant from the discourse of the individual, replete with material means and ambitious drive, who serve to dominate those whose life chances and property are limited by the same economy. Alongside ownership of the means of production, the victorious 'class' achieved this by creating a new economic structure founded on money rather than land (Day 12). 'Money provides a common measure by which commodities can be exchanged. It does so,' Day states, 'by representing commodities not as they are but what they have in common, and what they have in common is the human labour that produces them (12). However, if the sum of labour expressed through money in a particular commodity is exchanged for that of another equal one, then, as Heinrich explains, the only way for one capitalist to make a profit would be at another's loss. If an 'exchange of equivalents' takes place, then a profit is made by neither party. Therefore, the capitalist must necessarily exploit the labourer who produces the commodity – by purchasing

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[3] An interesting analysis of the problem of 'Self Ownership' is outlined by G. A. Cohen in chapter 9 of *Self-Ownership, Freedom and Equality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Print.
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from him his labour for less than he will sell the product it produces. The profit the capitalist accumulates in these exchanges Marx calls 'surplus value' (Heinrich 87). The entirety of capitalist society, with all its inequality, for Marx, is thus dependent upon the exploitation of those whose only property is their own bodies, by those who own material wealth and the means of production. Marx describes the effects of this process thus:

> in proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e., capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed – a class of laborers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labor increases capital. These laborers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce. (Marx and Engels 68)

It is of particular importance here to note that this new economic mode, as Day states, constitutes new meanings in how people are perceived (72). He helpfully outlines how new social identities were formed: 'the perception of people in terms of their productive capacities,' he writes, 'promoted a mechanistic view of the body' (72), or, as Marx himself puts it, '[the laborer] becomes an appendage of the machine' (Marx and Engels 69). The result of this process can be seen as a further distancing in conceptualisations between the body, the means by which the poor exist, and the mind, employed in the mental wherewithal of the wealthy to exploit the former. This illustrates a key factor in constituting how 'bourgeoisie' or 'middle-class' and the 'working-class' view themselves and each other through the context of capitalism.

The value of Marx's observation, for this thesis, is not in the revolutionary potential he predicted in relation to this exploitation, though the potential for its expression through literature will be explored later. Instead, its relevance lies in the way these terms of social production and exchange provide the means by which the 'middle-class' and 'working-class' create each other. The language which describes the latter also describes the terms by which he is created. Firstly, as was displayed in the feudal system, the work of the labourer creates the

means by which the existence of its superiors is afforded. The 'middle-classes' are created by the labour of the working-class, and able to inhabit particular lifestyle and status in society. Secondly, the exploitation the latter suffers at the former's hands then limits, through the resultant poverty, the exposure of this group to education, and possession of particular types of cultural means. Thus a circularity of social divisions is produced.

Weber and the Materialization of Morality

The above theory is helpful in the understanding it lends to how these two dominant 'classes' have been produced and then reproduced through the economic, and culture respectively. This theory has by no means gone uncontested, however, nor has it been the only attempt to come to terms with social divisions. Max Weber's contribution to this debate is also important. A currency of ascetic worthiness and morality can be traced from his diverging theory regarding how a social divide through capitalism occurred.

In his influential text, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber argued against Marx's historical materialism, and against also an historical account which entirely precludes a role for religion in the burgeoning capitalist epoch. Weber proposed that particular theological strands of the Protestant church provided the foundation upon which a successful capitalist enterprise could be built. As Crompton writes,

> Weber argued that rational, ascetic Protestantism, as developed within a number of Calvinist churches and Pietistic sects […] during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, provided, through its rules for daily living a particularly fruitful seedbed for the development of capitalism' (34).

It is his analysis of the Calvinist idea of pre-destination which induces the most interesting perspective here. 'In the course of its development,' says Weber, 'Calvinism added [...] the necessity of proving one's faith in worldly activity [,] therein [giving] broader groups of

religiously inclined people a positive incentive to asceticism' (74). This 'fake it to make it'
approach was in response to a doctrine that suggested no definitive way of knowing one's
electivity. The problematic need for a pure church, exclusively made up of God's chosen
people, was overcome by the bodily enactment of the values of the kingdom of God – *decency,*
piety, charity, responsibility, judgement, intelligence and sobriety – by all who hoped for his
salvation (Weber 74).

> The wonderfully purposeful organization and arrangement of the
> cosmos is, according to both the revelation of the bible and to natural
> intuition, evidently designed by God to serve the […] human race. This
> makes labour in the service of impersonal social uses appear to promote
> the glory of God and hence be willed by him. (Weber 67)

It was by this logic that the Lutherian notion of the 'calling' was appropriated to new Calvinist
ends. 'The significance of the notion of the calling, and the mode in which it is employed in
protestant beliefs,' writes Giddens, 'is that it serves the mundane affairs of everyday life within
the all-embracing religious influence' (127). Thus the calling of every man is to embody his
duty to God, enacting his morality in his everyday existence. The appropriation of this idea was
important in that not only was a steadfast work ethic developed, but also that, in order for its
successful performance, 'the impulsive enjoyment of life, which leads away both from work
[…] and religion [became] the enemy' (Weber 112). Just as within this analysis Weber outlines
a fertile soil for the growth of capitalism having been laid spiritually, he also provides a
trajectory through which a moral distinction emerged to legitimate the impending inequality
created through capitalist growth. Put plainly, it was those who, through industrious dedication,
and mental application of control over the body, deserved the material rewards. This discourse
finds its articulation in Nietzsche's own work on morality, when he states: 'it has been the
'good' themselves, meaning the noble, the mighty, the high-placed and the high-minded, who
saw and judged themselves […] in contrast to everything lowly, low-minded, common and
plebeian' (396). 'It was', he says 'from this *pathos of distance*' that they first claimed their

right to create values and give these values names (396). Nietzsche makes clear that the groups who experienced the material benefit of capitalism, justified their gain through the moral stance delineated by Weber, which finds its basis in the rejection of *bodily* instincts and desires, by the superior and moral *mind*. In keeping with the Aristotelian dualism, the use of the mind becomes victorious over the use of the body, and, by extension, the notion that failure to succeed in work is rooted in lack of moral control, thus the ideological term 'undeserving poor' can be read here.

Mapping Emergent Identities

So far there are two seemingly competing frameworks through which to view the foundation of a capitalist system, both of which sees society divided between the dominant wealthy and the dominated poor. Marx's historical materialism places this relationship within the changes in modes of production and exchange, whereas Weber attributes it to a change in attitude influenced by religious ideology. Both of these theories house huge sociological importance individually. However, both perspectives also maintain the Aristotelian privileging of mind over body as a justification for social inequality. Moreover, there is a theoretical crossover in which one position provides space for the other and vice versa. In response to the rupturing of the old feudal system, and the emerging dominance of ambitious capitalist industrialists, space for new identities was created. David Cannadine has demonstrated that the redundancy of former labels employed to represent social divisions meant new ones could be fought over and contested (33).[4]

Read in dialogue with each other, the theories of Marx and Weber expose a relationship mutually beneficial to the new social group. It is clear that the economic growth, as evidenced

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[4] Cannadine sets out the two examples: the first was a hierarchical model, seldom questioned and based on landownership, and coats of arms, and descendency; the second was a strong argument for 'the professional man' to be absorbed into the nobility, or at least a competing term forged of 'town gentry, if not necessarily country gentry' (33). The latter was often either contested, or at least given an unprivileged value in comparison.

in Marx, resourced this recent economically dominant 'class' with a burgeoning power, which needed to be justified to those who had generational authority and those who were potentially being exploited. That this dominance was funded, in part at least, by the moral living displayed in Weber, provided the lines of sensibility through which this justification could take place (Day 96-7). This is articulated by Beverley Skeggs, who observes that at this point 'a significant move in the definitional history of class was made by the bourgeoisie who, in order to morally legitimate themselves, drew distance from the figures of the decadent aristocrats above [and] 'the unruly hoards below' (4). Built upon 'a monopoly of decency, piety, charity, responsibility, judgement, intelligence and sobriety' (Cannadine 72), this sensibility - indebted to the asceticism expressed in Weber – was the means by which this group protected, consolidated and further established its position. The wealth of this group, gained through the new economic order, enabled its political voice. In turn, this voice was employed to defend its position morally, and thus frame a distinction whereby the status of this new 'class' was deserved, and other groups were undeserving. In so doing, the victory of mind over body is underwritten, first by the dominance displayed in the industrious 'bourgeoisie' over the bodies of the poor; and second, by the former's mind's control over bodily impulses, and *rational* behaviour; the latter serving to create a framework through which subjects can be judged worthy or unworthy by their performance in relation to a bourgeois system of values. This important factor will now be explored in the work of a third social theorist.

Bourdieu and the Socio-symbolic Economy

Pierre Bourdieu is an important addition to the debate surrounding social division and identity, in that he attempts to build upon the idea of a link between their economic and moral conceptions (Crossley 86-7). In extension to a social cleft having emerged on the basis of material wealth, and been defended on grounds of morality, Bourdieu introduces a framework which understands the cleft in terms of various forms of capital. These manifest (as described

by the BBC's survey) in the economic, cultural, social and, most importantly for Bourdieu, the symbolic. The explication of what Cannadine et el observe above as attempts by the bourgeoisie to distinguish itself, can be seen in relation to what Bourdieu develops here. As Crossley outlines, 'Every individual, on Bourdieu's account, has a portfolio of capital. They have a particular amount or volume of capital, and their capital has a particular composition' (87). These 'other forms' of capital are linked to his theory of 'habitus' and 'field'. Habitus, as Crompton describes, is 'a set of acquired patterns of thought, behavior and taste, that is, a system of dispositions (or competences)' (100), which are the embodiment of the social conditioning to which an individual or group has been party. This 'social conditioning' is, as much as anything, located within the social position occupied by the subject, for example, the background culture in which each individual grows up, including schooling and family. The Field may represent society at large, or a more specific part of a social culture, such as education, the stock market, or the arts. The Field can most easily be illustrated through the comparison to the football field, when represented visually. Patricia Thompson visualizes 'a square with internal divisions and an external boundary, with the set positions marked in predetermined places' (66). Each field has rules that each player must understand in order to take part successfully. Moreover, its players compete for a better position, which is both defined in terms of the possession of the aforementioned capitals and determined by the range and depth of the capitals which are acquired. However, to take the metaphor further, the playing field is uneven. Some players begin the game with a greater amount of specific capital (understood in this context as habitus), which enables the reproduction and further accumulation of that capital and thus predisposes a more successful field position (Thomson 66). So both habitus and field are structural and structuring, and it is the way these relate to each other in the struggle to increase capital and thus social positioning, which constantly produces our understanding of lived experience and practice in divisions of society (Maton 56).

That variations in habitus bare a direct correlation to conditions of location in social space becomes important when measuring these divisions.

Bourdieu claims, as Nick Crossley points out, 'that what he [means] by "distinction" is simply that clusters of individuals in social space each develop cultural peculiarities which mark them out from one another' (94). The focus upon these divisions becomes the site of 'symbolic struggles [in which] members of those clusters seek to establish both the superiority of their peculiarities and an official sanction for them' (Crossley 94). Each group attempts within particular arenas to impose a language or currency by which it can frame its own dominance. However, as already displayed, certain groups occupy a privileged position which gives them the social power to make themselves heard over other groups. Accordingly, it is their dominance, hinged upon symbolic value couched in their own language or currency, which, as Beverley Skeggs suggests, then enables the execution of a moralizing effect in their own interests, or 'an assertion of worth, that is not just economic' (14). Bourdieu gives a especially strong example of this process taking place in the field of art:

> A work of art has a meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded. The conscious or unconscious implementation of explicit or implicit schemes of perception and appreciation which constitutes pictorial or musical culture is the hidden condition for recognizing the styles characteristic of a period, a school or an author, and, more generally, for the familiarity with the internal logic of works that aesthetic enjoyment presupposes. (xxvi)

Therefore a consumer of art bereft of 'the specific code' of sensibility becomes displaced in an incoherent accumulation of properties in the artist's work. Having not inherited the skills or language (habitus) with which to perceive or articulate its perception, the individual is disposed to respond only by gut reaction (or with his/her body), which within this culture (or field) is attributed less value, and as such less worth than the considered educated response (from the mind). A striking homology is expressed here, between the forms of cultural capital explored

through this example and the dichotomy of body/mind outlined above, privileging the latter and those able to employ it. As Stephanie Lawler observes, 'unlike the facile pleasures of the flesh which anyone might enjoy, [true] appreciation […] is held to demand a transcendence of the body that only some […] can attain (Lawler, 2005, 437). By this process the value of a person can be seen to be aestheticized. The moral positioning of 'taste' as marker of individual worth becomes further means by which one group of people, possessing this faculty, can be distinguished. This can be found throughout Bourdieu's theory of capital which can be extended to include clothes, bodies, houses (ibid). The distinguishing features are always ultimately economic, which create and are created by a mind/body cleft. These are then legitimated by symbolic value (found in the logic of aesthetics described above), whose embodiment through specific practices and knowledge adds moral worth to a subject. Bourdieu's work here articulates the dialogue found between Marx's and Weber's theories, extending it to encompass newer, deeper perspectives on how moralizing and economic social distinction takes place. The wealth of a particular group creates the power to produce certain moral or valuing boundaries through a peculiar language or currency, which serves to distinguish this group's worth (through cultural capital) from other groups, in particular fields. As Skeggs affirms, through historical repetition connecting these cultural capitals to dispositions taken in certain sites, this symbolic (moralizing) value can be inscribed onto individual bodies (11). Furthermore, that 'not only [can] certain value [be] read onto certain bodies, but also the association of certain bodies with certain practices […] simultaneously enable […] value to be attributed, making a symbolic connection between body, value and practice (11). This produces in turn an institutionalised sanction of particular practices and individuals of competence within those practices, legitimating social distinctions, which are articulated as natural, unquestionable. The embodiment of these symbolic values can be seen to permeate a variety of social exchanges and activities. Accordingly, examples can be found ranging from the disposition one has when choosing a meal in a restaurant, the job one does, to

the feeling of familiarity the language of this thesis or even paragraph evokes within an individual. The fact that, engaged in certain activities, individuals at home within a certain other clusters will feel like a 'fish out of water' is due to symbolic meaning transmitted from said activity (within a particular field), which leaves the individual intuiting he/she does not belong, due to a lack of competency (Maton 56). The institutionalisation of a particular language which apportions value to particular experiences, affords a higher state of cultural currency to individuals who are competent and confident within these certain experiences, affording them the ability to stand out from the mass, and to an extent be legitimized as a proper person of status in relation to those who do not own these competencies.

What these examples illustrate is that forms of cultural capital are acquired through objective conditions and objective location, which place cultural capital and morality as heavily reliant upon the economic. This develops further the dialogue between Marx's historical materialism and Weber's moralism, and serves to legitimate social distinctions based upon the privileging of mind over body being articulated as natural, and thus unquestionable, and by extension reproduces them.

How Symbolic Value is Attributed and by Whom

Employing the concept of capital asserted above, Skeggs develops a theory of exchange and the apportioning of value, with a specific focus upon what is presented as symbolically valuable (11). In her work on inscription, she argues for the importance of keeping separate the use-value and exchange in symbolic economy, in order to see how possibilities for evaluation are different for different groups. 'What may have a use-value for one group,' she says, 'may not have exchange-value' (17). As an example, Skeggs applies these principles to the notion of femininity. Femininity, she argues, is particularly problematic, in that it can be a form of cultural capital in certain legitimized settings, such as marriage (which through law, benefits and so on is sanctioned by the state) but is not as universally advantageous as masculinity. (16)

For masculinity not only enjoys the benefits brought through femininity being performed in the context of marriage, but outside of this institutional setting, its value is transferable, whereas femininity is not. The examination of the workplace, for example, demonstrates how the enacting of typical masculine behaviour carries particular attributes traditionally thought conducive to management and higher levels of status within industry, from which the feminine is typically excluded. This illustrates the necessity of weighing power relations within the symbolic system. In shifting focus from the subject/ object itself, it becomes possible, through the investigation of relationships and power which enable the exchange, to unearth whose perspective attributes value in the first place, in other words, who is making the rules to suit themselves (Skeggs 11). When applied in the context of this thesis, the use of this theory clearly highlights that the power attained through the economy has presented the opportunity for the development of a moral system, whereby symbolic values of one group are given considerable privilege. (Lawler, 2005, 439) There are distinct rewards for those inscribed with the symbolic mind, over those inscribed with those of the 'body'. Further, it is particularly important that, as is demonstrated above, this system is normalized and thus seen as natural. This means that an almost unquestioned assumption that attributes attached to the 'symbolic' mind are valued with intrinsically higher merit than those of the body operates throughout society, so even the 'objective' is absorbed.

A return to the BBC's new class survey illustrates this well. The investigation adheres largely to Bourdieu's principles of social division. In its redefinition, seven new class types were invented: Elite, Established Middle Class, Technical Middle Class, New Affluent Worker, Emergent Service Workers, Traditional Working Class, Precariat. The sociologists' response in the BBC's attempt to reconfigure the class system was perhaps an honest one in relation to changes observed in society. However, the act of making these new labels becomes part of a value system which endows certain demographics with higher symbolic capital then others. The act of attributing a label in light of answers given to questions about employment, cultural

and social activities does not escape the underlying assumptions already in place within the current socio-symbolic system. As Skeggs states, 'the paradox of needing to name, identify, quantify and know also [produces] the possibility of breathing life into [it],' or in this case, consolidating further a value system already in place (3).

Alongside the broadly inaccessible academic essay mentioned above, the BBC produced a class calculator, which claims to mimic the initial survey (Atherton et al.). 161,000 UK citizens took the actual survey; 4.8 million are claimed to have taken the BBC's calculator. It therefore follows that public consciousness in terms of this new class structure will be more akin with how the simplified analysis represents social divisions. This simplified version yields instant results: having answered four groups of questions, one is placed within a new class immediately. Beyond the individual discovering his/ her 'new class', what is important is that each label is characterised by a description outlining its common properties. Having taken the test on several occasions myself, each time giving details of the same low annual income, but varying the 'status' attached to the employment of friends (my social capital), and citing cultural interests which carry 'higher' and 'lower' cultural capital, I was always defined as a precariat: 'the most poor and deprived class,' who 'tend not to have a broad range of cultural interests' (Atherton et al.). This was despite having, on one occasion, named my friendship circle as lecturers, doctors, and solicitors, and my cultural and leisure choices as watching ballet, opera, and listening to classical music. This evidence seems to suggest that, while the popularized survey claims a wider ranging approach to capital, material wealth is still privileged over cultural capital to the point at which the calculation makes generalizing assumptions about the cultural and aesthetic tastes, based upon economic circumstance. These labels come to represent by and large how the cultural outlook and, by extension, behaviour, of those with lesser life chances comes to be understood by the rest of society and perhaps themselves. A subject who falls into the lower social stratifications materially is postulated as a certain inescapable type, whose behavior, aesthetic taste, and thus morality, pales beside that of

a 'higher-class' subject. This, in turn, serves to underwrite and legitimate economic distinction. Therefore, as has been displayed throughout this section, a subject's material wealth which – for the most part - is determined by whether one employs his/her mind or body to generate income, directly impacts his/her cultural practices and behaviours. These, in turn, are classified in relation to what has become (an almost objective) common understanding of higher or lower culture characterised too by either body or mind. That both economic and cultural properties of an individual feed into one another provides a cyclical pattern for the division of society, and the justified privileging of one group over the other. The already symbolically imbibed cultural and social capital is immediately connected to a lesser materially rewarded life. As Skeggs explains, the 'performative' nature of both categorizations and theory produces rhetorical spaces, and 'the kind of utterances that can be voiced with an expectation of uptake' (45). That this process is exemplified here through academic and sociological study, relatively high-paid professional practices which both house high social and cultural capital, illustrates further how the economically privileged create the terms by which the lower-class are understood, and through which society understands itself and its divisions.

2. Masculinised Man

The social divisions explored in the previous chapter bear striking correspondence to the divisions of identities in social roles ascribed to men. Within the dichotomy of mind and body each representation can be seen to have been couched in masculinised functions, through which an identity is produced. Priests and lords are titles ascribed traditionally to men, as is the role of the capitalist businessman, the serf, the machine-worker and the manual labourer. This section will focus upon how an understanding of western masculinity is dependent upon the contemporary economic structure, which resources the bourgeois value system. Building a constructivist approach, it will present a case for the production of hegemonic forms of masculinity in relation to the needs of capitalist production. Then, drawing on a number of cultural theorists, a parallel of the process of social distinction, founded upon cultural and moral capital, will be traced exposing restrictions placed upon lower-class male expression. Continuing in this vein, particular forms of social exclusion experienced by lower-class males will be explored, with specific attention being paid to the effects these have on how masculinity is performed. Finally, these performances will be weighed against the socio-symbolic code investigated, extending the theory outlined in the previous section, with reference to how these responses serve the overall bourgeois agenda.

Constructivism

This section will explore the significance of the struggle for economic dominance to the way particular types of masculine identities are produced. As Mac An Ghail asserts, most constructivist studies display at their core gender differences and power (1-4). However, in order to best understand the subtle nature of this process, it is first helpful to outline its clearest example. This is found in the division of the sexes at large. Michael S. Kimmel advances a theory on this theme in his book, *The Gendered Society.* Along with Engels, he articulates the important role played by private property, and in so doing places gender and power in relation

with each other, outlining how the division of the former serves the economic. 'Capitalism,' he writes, 'meant private property, which required the establishment of clear lines of inheritance' (Kimmel 58-59). As has been displayed in the previous chapter, the emergent discourse of the individual afforded men of certain means and attitude the opportunity to accumulate personal wealth; a process which helped serve to distinguish the emerging 'bourgeoisie' from other social groups. As a result, a man had to be sure, at the eventuality of his death, that the wealth he built up over his lifetime was passed to his heir and not the offspring of another man, thus maintaining his lines of economic privilege. Out of this need emerged, Kimmel says, the traditional nuclear family, monogamous marriage and the sexual control of women (59). Displayed here is the necessity from which gender differences were drawn to protect burgeoning economic power. In contrast to the former system, in which 'families were organised on a communal basis […] male-female equality, and a sexual division of labour without [unequal distribution of] any moral or political rewards,' women were now assigned a subservient role. Within this process, an implicit distance was established between man, as a righteous possessor and earner of property, and women as the moral threat needing to be placated.[5]

So far, this section has demonstrated that the privilege experienced by men in particular groups within the rise of capitalism is sustained, in part, by the control and dominance of women. By drawing distinguishing boundaries around gender differences which represent men as integral to economic growth, this dominance is shored up. Thus new identities are formed, as Connell asserts, in how this takes place in relation to reproductive practices, desire and,

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[5] Accordingly, Skeggs draws upon Finch, Stoler and others, to state that 'the moral reading of women's bodies and practices' and 'correspondence with discourses of sexuality [associated] with 'negative moral value' were key in generating class formations (4). Citing the 'scientific' investigation of working-class women by Victorian male reformers, can be read as class anxieties amongst the bourgeoisie projected onto the lower orders. By establishing a position in which sexual freedom was associated with prostitution and 'dangerous' lower-class women, it produced also its counter-ideal for its own female members: one of monogamy and respectable commitment to her husband. Continuing in this trajectory, Kimmel cites Eleanor Leacock's similar observations. In her work on the Labrador Peninsula, she notes a 'dramatic transformation of women's former autonomy by the introduction of … a commercial economy, [which] turned powerful women into home-bound housewives' (Kimmel 59).

importantly, the division of labour (74). A broad historical premise attests to the male domination of wage-earning throughout western culture, as displayed in examples of Herward (35), Collinson and Hearn ('"Men" at "Work"', 61) and Edley and Wetherell (97): Moreover, the cleft in gender identity expressed in each of these examples is read as having been legitimated and reproduced through discourse as understood in a Foucauldian manner, which manifests through a series of texts, such as sciences and common-sense, the media, and in a catalogue of institutions ranging from the family home, education, to the workplace and sports. Following this, Arthur Brittan has observed that 'gender does not exist outside of history and culture, [thus] masculinity and femininity are continuously subject to a process of reinterpretation' (51).

Having established how divisions of gender take place in order to procure and maintain economic dominance of the 'bourgeoisie', this process can now be expanded to show that 'manliness' is itself a contested territory. Edley and Wetherall are two theorists whose research displays the effects of the economic on the production of masculinity. This assertion is evidenced, they say, throughout points in history, at which 'one specific discourse of masculinity has dominated over all the other[s] [and that] the efforts to control [its] meaning […] have played a central role in the struggle for power' (Edley and Wetherall 106). This in turn shows that, akin to what Brittan advances, each new economic culture gives birth to new expressions of masculine identity, dependent on its need, and attempts to cast these as the socially accepted form. Edley and Weatherell demonstrate how this production of male bodies can take place, through the historical examples of the Crimean war and American Civil war. On both sides of the Atlantic during the second half of the nineteenth century, they say, both nations 'were concerned to defend their interests abroad,' and thus needed 'a new generation of fit and healthy young men, ready […] to throw down their lives in the interests of their respective countries' (107). As a result, drawing on Rotundo, they state, that historical records show an 'upsurgence [of] almost obsessional interest in the physical size and strength of the

male [form]' (106). This highlights the interplay of patriarchy and masculine performance, and the way these are expressed to meet socio-economic needs at different points in history. Alongside the necessary subordination and dominance over women, the capitalist economy needs to produce certain types of masculinity to fulfill the roles needed in its maintenance and advancement.

Collinson and Hearn, in their work on masculinity and workplace, layout the terms by which this takes place in the modern work environments associated with different 'classes'. 'Typically, write Collinson and Hearn, 'men's gender identities are constructed, compared and evaluated by self and others according to a whole variety of criteria indicating "success" in the workplace' ('Naming Men as Men', 146). In reading the three examples of workplace given by these theorists, similarities and contrasts can be drawn between men at work in different levels of the social hierarchy. Manual workers are understood to operate within a belligerent environment, in which group members are constantly tested with insults and teasing in order to sort the men, as it were, from the boys. Interaction is, Collinson and Hearn say, 'highly aggressive, sexist and derogatory, humorous yet insulting, playful but degrading' ('"Men" at "Work"', 68). The office environment, involving mental rather than physical exertion, houses its own 'masculine mystique'. The example of insurance sales is employed to display the mythology of heroic drama associated with men of the business world, who take the knocks of an aggressive financial market to win new business for their organization ('"Men" at "Work"', 69). Entrepreneurialism also maintains an exterior of 'hard-nosed' and aggressive competition, needed to 'penetrat[e] new markets and territories', which identifies itself with others of similar disposition, to the exclusion of those not 'man enough' to handle it ('Naming Men as Men', 146). What is clear then, is that the behaviour of men employed in each of these class spheres appears to be underwritten by particular types of aggression and competitiveness. The following two sections will explore the political significance of these constructed identities, looking in particular at how and then at why they are produced.

Hegemonic Masculinity and its Performance

As the previous section explains, manliness is performed in a variety of ways dependent upon the economic needs and social practices of society. Alongside a continued need to retain power and wealth, the necessity for certain kinds of social defense and production has influenced the particular form and expression of current masculinity dominant in the west. This process Connell begins to develop within the theory of Hegemonic Masculinity (77). Appropriating a term coined by Gramsci's analysis of class relations, Connell describes:

> [a] configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted
> answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees
> (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the
> subordination of women. (77)

However, as has been demonstrated in the previous section, it is not only a subordination of women which takes place. In her analysis, Connell goes on to highlight the many ways hegemonic masculinity is exemplified in society, attributing roles to top level business and military, but also to icons, fantasy figures and celebrity. These correlate, she says, to an overall cultural framework in which one type of male performance subordinates all others (ibid). Edley and Wetherell make a similar observation, through what they describe as 'cults of masculinity.' These cults, they write, 'can be seen as providing members of a cultural community with what it means to be a man: what one looks like, how one should behave and so forth' (106). While Connell outlines the most prominent form of domination and subordination in the discrimination received by homosexuals, she demonstrates that other masculinities are susceptible to the same subordination. This takes place, she says, through 'a rich vocabulary of abuse: wimp, milksop, nerd, turkey, sissy […] pushover [… mother's boy, four-eyes' (78-9). A practice which, Edley and Wetherell assert, is legitimated through the equation of true

manliness with physical strength, or, a heroic overcoming through a quality that affords an individual authority over the rest (107). As displayed in the previous section, each masculinity, dominant in its respective workplace, can be read in this manner. For although the degree to which they differ is reliant upon the type of activity they are required to perform (office work, sales and marketing, heavy lifting), each manifestation pays heed to an overarching emphasis on a type of toughness and gallantry, which sees the masculine expression as privileged over all other forms.

This type of behavior is explained by an exploration of Judith Butler's work, which reads the body as a historical construct. Interpreting Simone de Beauvoir's statement that 'one becomes a woman,' (301) Butler says that we cannot know the body outside of a time specific context. By this, she means 'the body [is] 'signified within an historically specific discourse' (Butler 254 quoted in Lloyd 38), as she expands on de Beauvoir to elucidate the performative nature of the gendered body. The action intimated by the verb 'become' points Butler to the question of self-reflexivity. That is, the entering into a process of learning to perform gender, as one would acquire a skill (Lloyd 39). One of the ways Butler takes this further is by analysing the performance of drag queens, and how men are able to wear feminine identity on their bodies, through the way they move, sit, through the posture they assume. This, she argues, drawing on the work of Esther Newton, reveals the arbitrary way in which gender attaches itself to a sexed body: 'in place of the law of heterosexual coherence,' she says, 'we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity' (Butler 188). In emphasising the distinct patterns of feminine action from the supposed 'nature' of the male, Butler points to an incoherence which exposes the socially contingent nature of sexual identity.

In a similar way, dominant forms of masculinity can be seen as a learned performance, or an acquired set of practices. In addition to the heteronormative functioning of gender performance highlighted by Butler, the masculine cults referenced above can be seen as

engendering types of performative behaviour, such as the culture of manual labour, to which 'piss-taking' is integral. As noted earlier, this is a part of the currency by which men of the lower classes can earn their status as one of the group, when Collinson and Hearn articulate: 'those who display a willingness to "give and take it" are accepted into the masculine subculture' ('"Men" at "Work"', 68). Moya Lloyd observes, 'when we endeavour to become a particular gender we aim, by and large, to approximate the historical and cultural norms that define what the gender ought to be' (39). Accordingly, it follows that there is a chain of signifiers, postures, ways of acting, which function to define and thus prescribe 'normal' patterns of behaviour to gendered subjects. For Butler, these are largely focal points of heteronormativty, such as desire, or sexual preference. However, it can be extended to encompass codes of behaviour, already cited above.

Butler goes on to display the way the behaviour codes serve to regulate the social and economic lives of the subject by the threat of penalization (40). Cultural intelligibility is a term coined by Butler to explicate this. Through this phrase she describes the patterns of signification noted above as a system which produces legitimate and illegitimate subjects. Following on from this, Butler articulates the idea of the aspiration to a 'livable life,' and that in order to experience life as livable (or legitimate) an individual must subscribe to the language of normalization:

> maleness entails masculinity expressed in sexual desire for women, femaleness entails femininity expressed in the opposite. Gender and desire are thus seen as aspects of sex. As such, intelligible genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender and desire. (Lloyd 34)

If any individual, she says, falls outside of this normalizing arrangement, then they fail to be understood. They are, in other words, culturally unintelligible. A man who does not fit into this matrix of understanding, for example, will be seen as an unworkable subject, unnatural, perhaps even not a real man. Again, though Butler is predominantly speaking here in terms of,

what she calls, the heteronormative matrix, this can be extended to an understanding of dominant forms of masculine behaviour. The process of penalization may vary, in that, for example, there are no explicit laws criminalizing or limiting the material benefits of, say, a camp heterosexual man. However, taking time to consider the response that might be given to a male figure who plays for the local darts team with his non throwing hand on his cocked hip; or a man who when exposed to the 'piss-taking' of manual labour sub-culture breaks down and cries; or a man who has a nervous breakdown in response to the 'hard-nosed' business world previously described, affords valuable insight. It is easy, despite a lack of legal or specific institutional punishment, to imagine how these examples may make difficult the respective social and work environments of these men. In all spheres of the socio-economic hierarchy similar scenarios might be cited as examples of how failure to meet the regulatory system first expressed here through Butler, could result in responses delegitimising a 'livable life'. The following section will explore in more detail the specific political implications of this for the economically disadvantaged male.

Gendered Social-Economic Distinctions

Hegemonic masculinity takes on a further political resonance when seen in light of the observation above, that masculine performance is always produced to meet socio-economic needs. It is no mere coincidence that Connell employs the term hegemony, originally used to articulate class control, to describe these particular expressions of masculinity. The extent to which society's socio-economic functioning is dependent on the discourse of dominant masculinity can already be seen in what was expressed in the previous chapter on 'class'. Society functions when work is performed sufficiently, aided by adherence to the discourse of masculinity shown above. As displayed earlier, the labour of the lower orders has always been employed to sustain and create greater wealth and life opportunities for those of a higher status. Access to areas of employment involving the use of intellectual capacities is typically denied to

the lower classes, restricting them to simple, repetitive and often solely physical tasks. This is particularly pertinent in terms of identity for the working-class male, Andrew Sayer (2011) asserts, 'because what people are allowed to contribute […] has far reaching effects on […] how they view themselves and are viewed by others (9).' As the theoretical positions of Skeggs, Lawler, and Bourdieu on the symbolic economy demonstrate, greater value, and by extension symbolic and material rewards, are attributed to particular practices which house a greater cultural and social capital. As with Lawler's earlier observation, the responses and uses of the body (which anyone can possess) are seen as unimportant in relation to use of intellectual principles, which are valorized, and in turn valorize those who are able to employ them. This inscribes a regulatory status on the lower-class subjects bereft of employment roles which pertain to these valorized traits, privileging instead those in 'higher' roles. Thus an ideological victory for the mind over the body, which then reproduces itself in the social hierarchy of the male subject. An example of this is well articulated by Canaan, in her work on schooling and subsequent youth culture, she writes:

> Whilst academically successful young men were more likely to choose high status subject areas, those less successful were "directed into low-level, practice-based vocational subject areas … whose cultures … [emphasised] chauvinism, toughness and machismo … These forms of masculinity were unequal; those (usually middle-class young men) with higher qualifications could later wield power in large institutions (116)

As demonstrated here, a socially constructed perspective, posited through the symbolic framework examined in the latter part of Chapter One, extends its currency to masculinity. Despite the subscription of each dominant form to a particular language underwritten by 'toughness' and 'heroism', those masculine expressions associated with the use of the mind over those with the body are given privilege. As was shown by Skeggs and Lawler, the normalizing language of symbolic value inherently proffers a social reading by which the body, and its use by the lower orders is seen as less valuable, less distinguished and thus more vulgar

than that of the mind of its 'superiors', and through this process a distinction is consolidated.[6]

Following this, Ava Baron posits that, 'male workers accepted pride in physical strength as a substitute for control of their workplace' (147). Rejecting 'middle-class' privileging of the mind in employment, they emphasised the 'manly' components of their work in order to create a localized cultural framework through which they could elevate themselves (ibid). Collinson and Hearn read aggressive and derogatory behavior as an extension of this culture's attempt to negate those who occupy positions of higher prestige. By distinguishing their own roles as 'freer', more practical and manly, swearing, sexism and 'piss-taking' become a currency by which they can offset their exclusion from wider social capital ('"Men" at "Work"', 68). Canaan's analysis above broadens this perspective to encompass this wider social context. Like Collinson and Hearn's labourers, the young men of her study place an emphasis on hardness as a means to acquire social status. 'They performed,' she writes, 'outrageous acts […] in which they demonstrated physical might or acted violently towards a subordinate' (Canaan 119). This, she describes, was a means, akin to the attempts of manual workers, to distinguish themselves from others of their class and those of a higher class, who had their own social standing affirmed 'in sites more powerful and further afield' (118-19). 'Such behaviour,' says Steven Roberts, 'represents efforts at "making a claim to power where there are no real resources for power" (Connell, 1995) in response to marginalization in most social domains' ('Boys Will Be Boys', 2012). A return to Butler demonstrates how the system of cultural intelligibility serves to further restrict lower-class male behavior. The normative meanings inscribed upon certain performances of all men are part of a symbolic system which apportions less value to types of labour typically associated with the lower-classes. This means that even in enacting these performances they are emasculated, which, in turn, provokes from them a response that seeks identity in an accentuated culture coded in aggressive and sexualized behaviour. Therefore, the

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[6] It is useful to note here that empirical research have shown a reduction in the intellectual and cognitive capacities of those employed in simple and repetitive forms labour over a large portion of time (Sayer, 2011, 14), which would see the subjects of these types of employment trapped in the cyclical nature of the value system in which it is couched.

space within which a culturally intelligible, 'legitimate' lower-class male can 'be a man' is further confined. What is more, though the dynamics of this culture may symbolically subvert the values and meanings of 'class society', within its own sphere, the importance placed solely on body (seen as physical strength), the aggression and sexism performed serve to further vulgarize these men in the wider socio-symbolic system. As Karen Pyke observes, the framework through which society at large reads this behaviour affords men of privileged social position, through displays of 'civilized demeanor of polite gentility' (or displays of bodily control), a reaffirmation of their superiority as examples of morality and righteousness (532). Therefore, a double-layer of control can be read as coded within the socio-economic system, which, first, produces 'lower-class-based' masculinity according to its needs, whilst simultaneously de-valuing its expression; second, coerces the lower-class male into embodying forms of behavior, which are then vulgarized. This system serves to maintain and legitimate its distinctions, and through these, the unequal distribution of wealth.

This section has displayed the extension of economic and moral discourses, examined in Chapter One, to incorporate gender formation, demonstrating how these three strands are inextricably linked. Furthermore, it has established that specifically dominant forms of masculine expression are produced in order to serve a capitalist society whose structure benefits groups with higher material status. Lastly, it has drawn together the theories explored through Skeggs and Bourdieu to demonstrate that these masculine expressions are evaluated in symbolic terms, which ascribe a privileged position to mind over body. The reading of lower-status males is framed by a value system, (expressed in the previous chapter) which benefits those by whom it is created, relegating the lower-class male, both in terms of social role and a response to his social role, in relation to the distinguished individuals of the bourgeoisie. The normalizing symbolic system of representation will now be analysed in terms of what has been called 'The Middle Class Gaze'.

3. The Middle Class Gaze

As Skeggs has asserted, '[class] categories are not neutral terms but are rather the result of historical struggle' (27). In seeking to consolidate its social position, as has already been shown, the 'bourgeoisie' has drawn moral boundaries, encompassing valuations of worth amongst types of people through examinations of behaviours, practices of employment and tastes. Growing in political power, its legitimation of unequal distribution of economic wealth has been found in symbolic values placed upon certain cultural properties (as expressed in the mind/body duality), which has permeated society and now appears 'natural'. Sayer exemplifies this further in his work on shame. 'Class inequalities,' he says, 'mean that the "social bases of respect" in terms of access to valued ways of living are unequally distributed, and therefore that shame is likely to be endemic to the class experience' (95). The fact that certain groups, who have committed no shameful act, feel shame due to lack of access to these 'valued ways of living,' is, for Sayer, a condition of the symbolic order (95). This is a demonstration that, as Wacquant observes, symbolic systems are '*instruments of domination* [original emphasis]' (13). Explicating Bourdieu, he asserts that the symbolic means through which social divisions take place in the external world and the lower-class subject's internal perception of the world are inextricably linked (Wacquant, *An Invitation*, 13). 'Cumulative exposure to certain social conditions,' argues Wacquant, 'instills in individuals an ensemble of durable and transposable dispositions that internalize the necessities of the extant social environment, inscribing inside the organism the patterned inertia and constraints of external reality' (ibid). Thus the ideological perspective expressed within this symbolic system becomes now the lens through which each layer of society, even areas dominated by its value system, view the social world.

Following Mike Featherstone, Skeggs asserts that one root of this domination is in the historic idea of the 'possessive individual' (2004, 2011), by which she means the idea that 'cultural properties, resources and/or assets can be accrued to the self, propertized and institionalized to produce a specific form of personhood' (2004, 135). This process operates,

Featherstone initially writes, within a culture created by capitalist ideology, in which the individual is aware that 'he speaks with his clothes […] home, furnishings, interior design […] and other activities' (84). Moreover, the perspective from which particular choices of lifestyle consumption are privileged over others functions within the social sphere to emphasise the interests of particular social groups (Featherstone 85), thus leaving the other groups possessing only negative qualities (Lawler 2005). Accordingly, Skeggs reaffirms the Bourdieusian claim that a culture is produced by a requisite knowledge, or, as previously discussed, 'an accrual of cultural capital' which affords a group an identity at the exclusion of others. It is not things, but specific types of knowledge that is the most important component. Not the ability to own, but the knowledge of what to own and how to use it, and this is not limited to objects, but the ownership of cultural properties and experiences in employment and other arenas. In short, it is about disposition. The appropriation of Bourdieu's theory regarding the topology of social space, specifically the role of taste as its distinguishing feature is key. Bourdieu, as Skeggs points out, makes a case which deploys aesthetic constitution as indivisibly linked to cultural competence. In this theory, cultural competence is strongly alluded to by the 'tastes' which persons possess, particularly with regard to a knowledge of and relationship with objects and practices. Moreover, taste, as Skeggs shows drawing on Bourdieu, is always moral, any judgement based on taste is one made on the value of the subject: 'in matters of taste, more than anywhere else, any determination is negation[;] tastes are no doubt first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror […] of the taste of others' (Bourdieu 56, quoted in Skeggs 141). This theory was first relayed in the latter part of Chapter One, in which the higher-classes utilized 'cultural currency' (as demonstrated in Bourdieu's position on aesthetics in art) as a means to distinguish themselves as individuals of competence from the lower-class hordes (Lawler, 2005, 437). Having illustrated this through art, Bourdieu goes on to claim that there is no area in which a similar practice of refinement and sublimation of primary impulses does not yield the same results (xxviii).

By extension of this theory, Samantha Lyle appropriates Mulvey's 'Male Gaze' to explore, she says, 'mode[s] of production [hinged upon] the (mis)recognition of the working class as being of lesser value […] and as a pathological, abject other' (Mulvey quoted in Lyle 323). With particular focus on reality television, Lyle displays an example of which values (and whose) frame the ontological experience. She cites a particular episode of *Wife Swap*, in which a working-class female exchanges families with a female of the middle-class. She demonstrates a media bias within the opening scenes:

> The establishing shot shows their [Colin and Emma Sprye] family as a whole […] both parents are dressed smart-casual […] Emma stands next to her daughter and Colin next to their son […] They look like the model 2.4 family.
>   Mark and Lizzie Bardsley are not introduced the same way … the establishing shot of Mark and Lizzie is of them both holding young children – one-year old twins. The camera pans away and focuses on a further six children, one after the other…the slow reverse of the size of their family is clearly for dramatic effect. (323)

She contextualizes the framing of these shots, and their juxtaposition of interests, in wider anxieties in the UK with regard to the imbalance of middle-class and 'state-dependent working-class' birth rates. The working-class, Lyle observes, have historically been associated with a lack of self-control; that this treatment comes from those outside the working-class is implicit and begs the question: for whom are the working-class historically associated with a lack of self control? (323)

A transposition of Bourdieuian aesthetic qualities to the everyday is here presented as a distancing device through a middle-class perspective of what Lyle terms 'The Middle-class Gaze'. It is clear that this television show has been made to represent a particular perspective on social behaviour, and employs a system of codes which adhere, and thus promote the values privileged above. What is more, the perspectives, or dispositions taken, not only represent that of the makers of the show, but frame a rhetorical way of observing these behaviours, in which,

as (Lawler 2005) suggests, the viewer is implicated.[7] The mechanisms of codification which take place repeatedly, displayed by Lyle in terms of language, eating habits, clothing choice and employment in *Wife Swap* frame a position which provokes distaste in its audience at the vulgar life choices and performance of the lower-class family. Read in the context of this thesis, Lyle's analysis articulates a very similar process of cyclical exclusion experienced by the lower-class male. Through lack of access to the means of possessing the correct cultural capital, and divested of any tangible opportunity for status within the wider cultural context, the lower-class subject performs particular exaggerated types of behavior in attempt to win back some form of social space. This behavior, however, falls outside the same symbolic code that produces his initial location and thus reiterates the cultural differences of the subject, affirming the middle-classes' judgement of vulgarity and worthlessness. Lyle illustrates this process well using the latter scenes of the aforementioned *Wife Swap* episode. Aware that she is being judged, Lizzie becomes increasingly defensive and aggressive as she is being watched smoking:

> Lizzie: You think I'm picky, you think I am obnoxious and you think I am rude […] and you don't like me, do you not [...] way hey! Life's a bitch [...] And on that note [puts on 'posh' voice] I shall go and intake some nicotine. (327)

Eventually the ordeal becomes too unbearable for Lizzie and she quits the show. A full articulation of the victory of the Middle-Class Gaze is displayed in the final discussion between the families at the close of the show:

> Lizzie: Yeah look down your noses at us.
>
> Colin: It's not a question of looking down our noses Lizzie.
>
> Lizzie: [she is getting really angry at Colin, starts pointing her finger at them] Don't shout at me. You are no better or no worse than I am ... don't start fluttering your eyelids at my husband you fucking tart.   (Lyle 328)

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[7] Speaking of TV documentaries, Lawler asserts that audiences are assumed to be absorbed in a fictive middle-class 'we' by the commentaries and positioning of the working-class subject on camera, which in turn serves to distinguish and exclude anyone not middle-class. (432)

Lizzie's position, having been fixed outside of the 'normal' moral ways of practice, forces her to attempt to establish her own identity in aggressively contesting these 'normal' values. This provokes further distaste or disgust, thus presenting the economically advantaged 'Colin and Emma' with the moral high-ground, both in the eyes of the couple, and the viewing audience of the show.

This illustration functions as a micro-example of how discourse on taste (in Bourdieu's terms) produced by economically advantaged groups creates the dominant reading of social distinctions. And how, by extension, the identities of the lower-classes are fixed and reproduced. This has not only been demonstrated in purely 'class' terms, in Chapter One of this thesis, but throughout Chapter Two in relation to how masculine performance has been imbricated. There are parallels between the text present in *Wife Swap* and the situation of men in lower-class forms of labour (and, as will be explored later, in literature), who, through the restricted nature of the opportunities for expression imposed upon them by the middle-class value system, are forced into defensive forms of behavior and then subjected to judgement. Moreover, as Sayer demonstrated above, the socio-symbolic value system, which produces subjects for the middle-class gaze, also subjects all spheres of society, including the lower-classes, to understanding society and their social selves from within it. What is demonstrated in correspondence between Sayer's and Lyle's analysis is that the positioning of the audience within the middle-class gaze doesn't necessitate that the audience be middle-class, but its perspective, as seen in Wacquant, may be inscribed upon the view of each member irrespective of his/her subject position.

4. Conclusion

Thus far this thesis has examined the socio-economic production of class divisions. Section One has demonstrated how economically advantaged groups are able to frame a code of morality through which they distinguishes themselves as of higher-value than other groups, and therefore more deserving of its material wealth. Tracing a trajectory from the Aristotelian discourse of social division, through major class theorists, Marx, Weber and Bourdieu, it has shown that the same ideological perspective still prevails. Though expressed in slightly varying terms at each historical point (and by each theorist), the symbolic privileging of the use of the mind over the body is displayed as the means by which this economic division is sanctioned. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that the framework of this socio-symbolic system, expressed through discourse in the economic, education, the arts and media, infiltrates all spheres of society. The exploration of the work of Sayer, Wacquant and Skeggs has highlighted how the growing power of the bourgeoisie has enabled its value system to permeate the social reading of those who, by its very nature, it excludes. Chapter Two has explained how the western economic system produces competitive and aggressive types of masculinity in order to sustain its capitalist enterprise, which benefits the wealthy. Furthermore, it has extended the bourgeois framework discussed in the previous chapter to develop a perspective whereby these types of masculine expression are subject to its discourse. As a result, it has shown that the men of the lower-classes are fixed in positions whereby they are disqualified from access to valued forms of practice, and thus forced to subvert these values in order to glean a sense of positive identity. Consequently, men in symbolically lower forms of employment, such as manual labour, in order to acquire a sense of positive masculine identity, act out roles based on strengths, such as sexual prowess and physical power. However, these are seen as distasteful, vulgar and thus immoral in respect of the dominant socio-symbolic order and unintentionally underwrite the social distinctions already set in place by the economically advantaged. Therefore, the lower-classes are demonized further and the social cleft is sustained. Chapter

Three has employed the analyses of both previous sections to elucidate how this dominant social and moral framework operates. It has highlighted how, in all areas of society, distinctions based upon cultural and moral capital place an (apparently natural) higher value on all performances associated with the mind's dominance over the body, thus illustrating how the middle-classes not only control the means by which society is divided, but also how this division is read. The implication of the lower-classes within this social reading funds a conception based upon the middle-class values which causes them to perceive themselves as less valuable than their social superiors. This theory will now be worked out in the production of the 'working-class' male in British fiction, and his reception by an audience.

Section Two

Introduction

Section One established the ways in which the economically privileged are afforded the power and space to produce, through symbolic meaning coded in institutional discourses (such as media, art and education) a system of moral values that permeates the reading of fractions in all social spheres. Furthermore, it demonstrated how this takes place within the arena of gender, particularly focusing on how it functions to restrict the possibilities of identity for lower-class men. The second section of this thesis concerns itself with how this is articulated through literature, extending work already explored through Bourdieu, Skeggs and Lyle. The first section (Chapter 5) will advance a theory that incorporates the socio-symbolic nature of class distinction with culturally prescribed gender performance as an intrinsic part of mainstream literature. Employing the theoretical perspectives of additional cultural theorists, it will outline devices necessary to enhance a narrative's believability. Accordingly, it will propose a framework through which the believable male working-class protagonist is produced and read, attempting to demonstrate the ways in which this production and reading is absorbed within the existing socially constructed gaze of the middle-class.

With this framework for reading in place, Chapter 6 and 7 will apply readings of fictional lower-class protagonists from two eras of the twentieth century. In so doing it will investigate the ways current socio-economic discourses and class interests are intrinsically linked to the ways in which literature perceives and produces the lower-class male subject. Through the examination of how specific and well-known characters from each era respond to their subject positions in expressions of their masculinity, the question will be raised as to whether these representations present the possibility of resistance of institutionalized class systems in each period, or whether they work to underwrite the existing social structure.

5. The Role of Literature in the Cultural Production of the Lower-Class Male

The Necessary Nature of Characterisation

It is easy to grasp how, in any representational medium, producing an accessible and believable character is a necessity for a successful text. The author needs to present her/his protagonist in recognizable form in order that an audience fully believes his/her actions and buys into the narrative at large. As Robert McKee coaches in his creative writing guide, characterisation 'is a work of art […] a *metaphor* for human life [its] aspects are designed to be clear and knowable' (375). Thus, the creation of any narrative contains typical rules in order to facilitate a clear audience understanding of its characters. These rules resemble that which is understood by the academic term, 'Typing'. Typing is a practice, Richard Dyer says, without which 'it would be difficult, if not impossible, to make sense of the world' (quoted in Hall 275). Each culture needs a system in which participants can broadly classify and thus understand individual objects, people or events, so subjects can communicate successfully (akin to the structuralist theory famously advanced by Saussure).[8] According to Dyer, it follows that we are 'always making sense of things in terms of some wider category [and thus,] come to know something about a person by the roles played by him/her, [and] by assigning to him/her membership of groups, according to class, gender, [and] age' (257). The culture of the fictional narrative is no different, except its system of classification (the things against which the subject is defined) is more narrow, and thus its typing must go further. McKee's metaphorical 'person', for example, must be distilled in order that the relationship of the reader to the text is workable. Though a subject in the real world may be a complex mix of the aforementioned identifiable types, and subject to change, a fictional representation cannot be; as McKee stresses, 'I know Rick Blaine

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[8] For a full analysis see Hall 31

in CASABLANCA [original CAPS] better than I know myself. Rick is always Rick, I'm a bit iffy' (375).

McKee expresses that within fictional characterisation there is room only for an acute representation of the subject. A representation of life-scale complexities would be a task more than book-length in itself. Instead what is needed is a subject boiled down to a few essential and accessible traits, readily *recognizable* to a reading audience. Consequently, Edley and Weatherall assert that a dominant male character is usually represented in one of three competing masculine forms. These are the 'muscle-bound all-action fighting machine', the 'sensitive intellectual with a wry sense of humour', and the 'charming and sophisticated gentleman with impeccable style and manners' (Edley and Weatherall 106). These are the well-worn, established and recognizable tropes of fictional masculinity, located repeatedly (with only minor revisions) throughout the canon of successful representational practice. Akin to the hegemonic forms of masculinity examined in Section One, these examples correspond to versions of dominant masculinity expressed through divisions in 'class' employment practices, or, simply put, the economy. The Man of impeccable taste mirrors the wealthy capitalist, whose disposition has been funded by economic privilege; the intelligent wit can be read within the bourgeois project of self-improvement; and the muscle-bound fighter is representative of the manual labourer. Furthermore, the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and fictional representations can be seen in mutually beneficial terms: the fictional character works as part of wider discourses (named by Connell as icons, fantasy figures and celebrity) contributing to the legitimation of hegemonic rule; the wider discourses of the latter provide a touch-point in 'reality' which lends authenticity to the fictional character. There comes a point, however, when these representations take their leave of 'reality' and become reliant upon each other in their production of meaning. A useful illustration is found in the way the Man of Taste can be traced throughout the portrayal of James Bond. A cursory review of the films' history demonstrates that, from Sean Connery's roles in Sixties to the recent roles of Daniel Craig,

there is a language with which the audience is familiar and by which each actor negotiates his enactment, but one which holds little room for variety. Each Bond is always weighed against the last ('James Bond'), and has to embody the heroic performance of defeating the villain, foiling evil and capturing the heart of the desirable female; and it has to be done with a high manner of sophistication. Applied to the other two variants of fictional masculinity, The Intelligent Wit (Kingsley Amis' Jim Dixon through to Martin Amis' Charles Highway) and The Fighting Machine (Lee Child's Jack Reacher), it is made clear that successful fictional characterisation works in relation to other similar representations, built up over time to create a system easily recognised by its audience. The functions of this system are elucidated in an examination of Frederic Jameson's text *Post-modernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, in which he explains the role of simulacrum.

The Peculiar Déjà vu and the Culturally Believable Man

Speaking of the historical characters in Doctorow's *Ragtime* Jameson suggests it is 'impossible for us to receive their representation without the prior interception of already acquired knowledge or doxa' (24). He asserts that it is the existing body of knowledge about a subject, which has been built up over time that lends a text its authenticity. In this instance, the historical characters in question do not find a definite referent in material history, but instead are believable in adherence to representations already produced about that specific historical period. Their meaning has been deferred onto that which has already simulated this period and it is to this simulacrum that these characters relate. In the same way, the fictional portrayal of the male body, described in the work of Edley and Wetherell, can be read as an ongoing 'relationship of signifiers among themselves' at work in the continual reconstruction of masculinity (Jameson 26). This in turn produces identity traits acknowledged as universal upon which new representations can be built. Alongside the nature of successful characterisation, restrictions of the male character are also revealed by this theory. For a masculine protagonist

of any of the three types to be accessible and easily recognised, he must subscribe to the 'normal' behaviour recognised in fictionalized masculinity. Thus, a striking parallel can be drawn between what Butler states as a livable life (in Chapter 2), and what, in the relationship between reader and narrative, can be termed a 'believable' one. For the sake of the narrative, the male protagonist must house the recognizable properties, which perform suitably the actions of his gender (and class) that have come to be expected by an audience: the language of masculine representations, conceived in the play of simulacrum, must be adhered to.

In an attempt to understand the significance of these rules to the characters that will be examined in subsequent chapters, it is useful to read them in relation to Skeggs's (2004; 2011) description of the capitalist notion of the possessive or propertied self. By this concept Skeggs asserts that '"the individual" was defined through his capacity to own property in his person: he is seen,' she says, 'to have the capacity to stand outside of himself [and] then to have an imagined […] proprietal relationship to himself as property' (2011, 498) Through the discourse of individualism, she draws a trajectory of how the self became reliant upon the acquisition of properties not only material but personality-based (and gained through lived experiences), making said self more valuable in relation to capitalist notions of exchange. The ownership of experience (which produced personality), then became part of what established the bourgeoisie as unique; a notion which the middle class implemented further by prescription of lesser-valued and thus less valuable personalities (bereft of worth of skill and experience) to each rung of society (2004, 22). These different levels of personality-based (unevenly valued) properties are important in relation to cohesive patterns of behaviour between the three possible masculine representations presented above.

A cursory glance through the canon of the three male representations named above reveals each type can be expected to embody the same undercurrent of masculine behaviour that belies the different economic types examined in Chapter Two. Sean Nixon characterises this undercurrent as 'aggression, competitiveness, emotional ineptitude and dependency upon

an overriding and exclusive emphasis on penetrative sex' (Nixon 296). However, for the purpose of this thesis, this list should be read as two separate properties. Property (A) contains aggression and competitiveness; Property (B) emotional ineptitude and an emphasis on sex. Seen in the examples of Bond, Reacher, or Jim Dixon, whether manliness manifests in a towering physicality, intellectual power, or is rich with sophistication, both properties conclude in dominance over other men and women. Victories over other men (by defeating the evil doer or beating another to the woman or goal), and over the woman (who gives herself almost helplessly to him) are eventually the full measure of successful manliness, and the end to a narrative. Conversely, the variations of typical classed personalities (and their unequally valued expression), dictates how these goals are acquired and by what means. The muscle-bound (working-class) fighting machine, reliant upon his body, is unlikely to suddenly develop an interest in poetry and overcome his adversities and win the heart of a female by virtue of sensitive verse. Similarly, the intellectual wit would seem somewhat preposterous if, instead of debunking his foe with cutting humour, he spontaneously tore open his shirt, delivered him several blows, then threw his love interest over his shoulder and swaggered into the sunset. Therefore, the terms by which the established system of simulacra which produces any male protagonist, in relation to Butler's 'livable (believable) life', can be expected to contain two important elements. Firstly, in terms of masculine expression and in line with what has just been observed, he must house two fundamental properties: (A) attributes which sets him above other men: this can be manifest in a variety of ways, which fall between the spectrum of fighting machine through intellect to the possession of impeccable manners; B) a woman, or women by which he is somehow favourably measured. His ability to win, possess or be admired by women is a strong driving force is any story. The process of attaining and displaying these attributes is the vehicle through which each individual story is told. Secondly, however, the means by which these are expressed must be in line with expectations of his personality-based self, prescribed by bourgeois (unequal) valuing discourse in relation to his

economic (and thus cultural) circumstance. The manner in which the two fundamental qualities are articulated must cohere with the expectancies built up by the chain of (classed) representations over time. Without the recognizable tropes of masculinity, displayed in qualities A and B, and without their manifestation in economic forms now typical of audience belief, each of these characters would be unable to fulfill their places in the direction of the narrative, and the plot would fail to be workable. The audience has come to recognise this victory of (classed) masculinity and its exhibition in respective male types through the system expressed in Jameson, and it is these devices to which each representation must both adhere and also rely upon. The issue of audience believability is, therefore, necessarily privileged over the complex nature of reality. If the masculine protagonist of any type deviates from audience expectation, then, as demonstrated in the theory of Butler, he would cease to be workable within a 'normalized' narrative structure. Any challenge to the expectation of an engendered character would disrupt the politics of the narrative, and itself become *the* story. Therefore, the objective of any 'normal' narrative of masculinity is one which seeks the above victories, within the specific parameters of expression particular to its (classed) type – a man of impeccable manners can never manifest on a building site as a homosexual. The question which arises is whether the likelihood of a victory is greater or less for any of the particular type of man.

Middle-class Gaze and the Production of Fictional Working-class Masculinity

This Chapter has thus far demonstrated how masculinity is characterised within successful fictional narratives. Mirroring the theory advanced in Section One, masculine characteristics are constructed, and one dominant form is produced and presented as normal. This discourse is embodied usually within three different variants, recognizable to an audience within a system of simulacra built over time (the fighting machine, the intellectual wit, the sophisticated man of taste and manners). Furthermore, the same aspects of aggression and competitiveness, and an

over-riding emphasis on sex underpin the essential, boiled down qualities of those three literary character types: a quality which elevates them above other men, expressed in relation to their socio-economic position and their ability to acquire and dominate a woman. These qualities are manifest in each of the three types of man in relation to their perceived personalities, as apportioned by the bourgeois discourse of the 'Individual'. In light of this, and having earlier outlined terms by which unequal value is assigned to masculine performances in distinct economic tiers, it is necessary to extrapolate on these two qualities to examine further their combined effects on perceptions of working-class men in literature. In keeping with Lyle's work on the institution of the media (cited in Chapter Three), Lawrence Driscoll has already observed that the same socio-symbolic system which posits the lower economic rungs of society as abject and other, has been employed by 'middle-class' writers to sure up the existing socio-economic system which benefits them. Speaking of writers such as Martin Amis, Zadie Smith and Will Self, he elucidates the 'ways in which [the middle-class] representation of class positions in British culture allows us to see [that] literature [and] culture […] have appropriated, channeled, and rebranded the troubling working–class' (Driscoll 4). However, having earlier drawn upon the work of Skeggs, Sayer and Lyle to present a case whereby this framework is normalized and thus used by all economic tiers in the reading of society, it is possible to broaden his analysis to encompass the voice of both middle-class and traditional 'working-class' authors. In order to achieve a productive analysis, the necessary traits for successful characterisation of lower-class masculinity will now be scrutinized in more detail, and in relation to wider social contexts absorbed by the middle-class value system.

Successful Working-Class Characterisation: A: The Stand-Out Personality Trait, or, Aggression and Competitiveness

The parallel between an identity premised upon unique qualities, seen in Skeggs in the above section, and the first property of a successful protagonist exposes further the socio-symbolic (capitalist) framework, through which the production and reading of fictional characters takes

place. An extension of the terms laid out in Part One, by which the moral worth of the mind is weighed over the vulgarization of the body, shows that the space in which the bodily performances of a lower-class protagonist may take place is limited by the economic culture of the period in which he is located. As observed earlier in Chapter 2, the social restrictions placed upon lower-class masculinity by the socio-symbolic system reduce its identity to expressions further diminished in the wider social context. The work of Collinson and Hearn, and Pyke has demonstrated that dominant masculinity draws on a currency of aggression and competitiveness in order to distinguish itself from others. Each of the three masculine types outlined by Edley and Wetherall can be seen to display this behaviour using the social symbols available within their economic culture. However, in order to distinguish itself as moral, the bourgeoisie posits a moralizing framework in which these same masculine qualities are valued differently in relation to their expression. The system which privileges activities broadly located in the site of 'the mind', over those in the site of the body, has produced a divisive line drawn between the middle- and working- classes, and as has been shown in Part One is directly linked to economic advantage. Additionally, in relation to the personality-based discourse of the individual, the system by which this line is drawn also projects onto the (economically disadvantaged) body, bereft of the potential for positive attributes, only negative traits, or as Skeggs has put it, 'all that [is] immoral and bad' (Skeggs 22). Moreover, in making the lower-class body 'the site of all that [is] dangerous, disruptive, contagious, sexual', an important obverse effect is produced: 'it [also becomes] a site of fascination for those who [a]re positioned as […] moral' (Skeggs ibid). It is clear, following this, that the body of the lower-class protagonist is produced by and subject to a similar middle-class discourse which serves to fetishize its historical referent. In relation to an audience, Baron observes, 'the act of seeing [is] an act of power,' and it is this power which affords the spectator a privileged position, through whose gaze the subject, Baron asserts, 'bec[omes a] spectacle whose […] classed bod[y is] transformed into [an] objects of desire (149). Furthermore, in line with the permeating

properties of the middle-class value system, an audience from all social spheres is implicated by the same reading framework. This means that the fictionalized body of the lower-class man is subject to vulnerability and judgment irrespective of social demographic of the reader. This works either directly or indirectly depending on the social position of the reader. One who is at home with the socio-symbolic value system (see Bourdieu Chapter One), and is served by it, can enjoy the benefits of the distinctions it makes between he/she and the protagonists. One who is ostracized by the value system at large, is coerced to align him/herself with it, in order to sit in judgment of the protagonist as a means to experience this same distinction in relation to him, and thus posit him/herself as morally sound. This demonstrates that this first property of masculine characterisation (the property which marks him out from other men) must be examined within the context of the economic era, in cooperation with the socio-symbolic system by which the lower-class male is produced. The quality which sets apart any believable male protagonist must align himself with the dominant responses of masculinity to its subject position delineated by its present economic reality. Therefore, each 'stand out' property (A) of a lower-class male protagonist will be exposed only in relation to the space created by the economic, and his response in negotiating that space.

Successful Masculine Characterisation: Two: The Object of the Woman

Following the fetishization of the body, it is simple to understand how the second property of successful characterisation becomes important. The fascination with the immoral site of the 'working-class' male body, almost by default assumes negative (in part sexual) behavior towards women. As Foucault writes: the middle class 'defined itself as different from the aristocracy and the working-class who spent, sexually and economically, without moderation […] it differed by virtue of its sexual restraint, its monogamy and its economic restraint and thrift' (100). The strength of the mind which, as has been displayed by Weber (Chapter One), is used to regulate the impulses of the body, becomes again for the privileged a source of

currency. Moreover, the sexualization of this masculine site produces a more salacious quality, ripe for fascination and spectacle, which provides the potential for both entertainment, and judgement of the subject. The reading, through a middle-class framework, of the protagonist's behavior towards women, both sexual and general, can be seen to be regulated by the social discourses available in the period in which he is located. One such discourse that will become important within this thesis is feminism. The appropriation of the feminist voice by the bourgeoisie is a salient example, already outlined in Section One, of how a socio-symbolic system serves to validate the privileged group. Regardless that masculine domination is underwritten by the same drives throughout all aspects of society, Karen Pyke highlights how the distinguishing socio-symbolism employed absorbs and appropriates the feminist voice. 'The ostentatious displays of masculinity', (documented above) performed by the laboring male to compensate for their subordination in the arena of employment, is judged, says Pyke, with disdain by the men of more privileged classes (538). The overtly sexual nature of lower-class men in their dominance over women becomes a magnified property by which the economically advantaged can measure their righteousness. Moreover, in pointing to the obvious misogyny of this form of lower-class hyper-masculinity, they disguise the undertones of patriarchy from which they also benefit (Pyke 532). Therefore, in the examination of specific fictional representations of masculinity, it is important to understand the current climate and reception of feminist political thought, in order to further understand how 'working-class' manliness is being produced by its appropriation.

Conclusion

This section has outlined the necessary characteristics of successful masculine representation. Furthermore, it has advanced a theory, along with Skeggs's, Bourdieu's, and Lyle's reading of socio-symbolic nature of representation, in which the performance of the lower-class protagonists are produced and read through a middle-class framework that permeates all social

spheres. It has given two properties which are inextricably linked to the believability of a character, and demonstrated that readings of these are produced, at least in part, in relation to two socio-political factors fundamental to masculine social identity. Therefore, the following chapters will interrogate representations of six 'working-class' characters, with reference to economic discourses and feminism in an attempt to understand their place within the wider social narrative of class conflict. The next two chapters are concerned with masculinities produced by the British New Wave and the literature created during the neo-liberal Thatcherite regime respectively. To better establish the context in which these masculinities were produced, an understanding of the socio-political factors will be outlined in the introduction of each chapter, in relation specifically to the economy – which produces the possibilities for masculine identity and performance; and the currency held by feminism during each epoch – which establishes the ground upon which a relationship to women can take place. Proceeding from this, each fictional masculinity will be analysed relative to its response to this climate, in order to establish the political and ideological consequences of its performance within the narrative, and, in turn, its challenge to or support of particular middle-class agendas.

6. Masculinity as Resistance: Working Class Men in the Literature of the Fifties

Having established the terms by which lower-class masculine characters are produced in the previous chapter, this one will examine the effects – both political and ideological – of their production in three prominent novels of the fifties. In line with the two traits of successful (believable) characterisation outlined above, the economic and political contexts from which these representations emerge will be framed. This will provide the basis upon which an analysis of each character's response to his subject position will be advanced. Accordingly, an investigation will take place into the how each character's 'stand out' quality and his relationship with women works in relation to his male counterparts in order to build a theory upon the similarities and disparities of their respective performances. This will take place in order to interrogate the underlying ideological narrative produced by the dialogue between these texts.

The Discourse of the Affluent Society

The most interesting aspect of the mid to late fifties in terms of this thesis is the dialogue between its discursive claim of larger degrees of wealth for all and the material experience of many of the country's lower-class subjects. Unarguably a new era for Britain had to some extent dawned, the most profound changes of which, Stephen Lacey says, were economic, and 'associated with a *perceived* general increase in prosperity [my emphasis]' (9). The turning point came, Sandbrook suggests, at around 1954, when the last of the food rations was lifted, but its wheels were set in motion years before (48). The facilitation of this process can be found in the accomplishments of economists, Sir William Beveridge and John Maynard Keynes: the former having provided a blueprint for state-sponsored social security, the NHS, and affordable housing (Sked and Cook 39); the latter affirming a style of economic management that ensured that aggregated monetary demands were sufficient to create and safeguards full employment (Oppenheimer 118). The political influence achieved by these two economists had forced the

political hand of the two most influential parties in Britain, subsequently creating a politics of consensus by which society would be governed over the years that followed. The result of this was that by the time the Conservatives came to power in 1951, 'the foundations of what historians call the post-war settlement were in place;' with the pledge to preserving the positive changes made to the economy (Sandbrook 58). These developments suggested that life, as experienced by the majority, had markedly improved: 'there were few worries regarding health […] people lived longer, enjoyed a rising standard of living and were not troubled by unemployment' (Sked and Cook 196). While the developments of this era had undoubtedly made a positive social impact, the terms by which these were employed as an all-absorbing currency that extended itself to all Britons has come under scrutiny.

'Increasingly,' Sandbrook says, 'the attention of the nation and its leaders [became] fixed on […] making and spending money, on families and jobs, on television and films, on pleasure (49). This phenomenon which, under the banner of Harold Macmillan's infamous tagline 'We've never had it so good,' has become known as the discourse of the affluent society, which 'resonate[d] throughout the decade, permeating the discourses of the popular media, national politics and academic sociology' (Lacey 10). Evidence for the *truth* of this discourse has been presented in many ways, however, the most prominently featured proof has been statistics of consumption. For example, the number of cars increased from just over 2 million to 8 million and the number of TV sets from 1 million to 13 million; this was funded by a rise in wages (average earnings increased by 110 per cent; and the average standard of living rose, in real terms, by 30 per cent (Lacey 10). During this period, the shift in economic climate, with respect particularly to employment, is said to have been felt to some degree at all rungs of the social ladder. Workers, especially the young and unattached, are supposed to have experienced the benefit of increased employment possibilities, both in terms of opportunity to move between employers, and the ability to afford leisure and consumer items − interests in fashion (Sandbrook 117), the cinema, alcohol, coffee bars and dancehalls (Sandbrook 436-9), which in

previous eras would have been unattainable. However, these experiences of new 'affluence', Lacey asserts, 'gave rise to a new mythology [which] presente[d] Britain as a unified society, which had successfully solved [its] major problems […] and that was essentially at one with itself' (11). This understanding was in many ways ideological.

Both Lacey and Sandbrook present cases of poverty and unrest which were glazed over by the dominant over-arching political discourse. The latter, for example, declares that despite the themed prosperity of Macmillan's tagline, poverty was experienced on a very real and material level for large groups of people: 'many of the poor,' he states, 'lived in houses barely fit for human habitation' (Sandbrook 179). Not so far beyond the suburbs (the poster area of a new perfect Britain), 'the world of the working-class had barely changed', especially in the north of England, Yorkshire and Wales (Sandbrook 178). What is more, in contrast to the claims that class disparity had decreased, Cannadine maintains that this period saw social perceptions of polarization between the poor and the wealthy actually sharpen (147). The beneficent subjects of traditional class structures were still striving to maintain and reproduce class distinctions. An intensification of focus on the bourgeois properties already observed in Part One, such as 'respectability' and particular symbolic qualities of personhood – imposed through a variety of discourses, enabled the middle-class to 'see itself as the public' and attempt to now impose its perspective on society at large (Day 179). These discourses when applied to positive aspects of the new economy, created obverse effects for the lower-class, stigmatizing them, Day says, as 'overpaid or else living comfortably on the dole' (179). Moreover, while new types of industry enabled fresh roles in employment for the middle-classes, characterised by the use of the mind (from science and engineering, through to lawyers and librarians, (Day 179) the heft of occupations open to the lower-classes were still proletariat in character, and predominantly manual (Sandbrook 109), rooting their practitioners firmly below their bourgeois counterparts in terms of symbolic capital. Thus the systems which

situated the working-class as of lower value within the socio-symbolic structure examined in previous chapters, can be seen to have still been firmly in place.

While it is clear that the late 1950s was a period privileged with a certain degree of positive social and economic change, it is also clear that this change was employed as a discourse which attempted to placate conceptions of society's persistent disparities between social groups. Lacey observes that the project of middle-class class definition was still succeeding in its efforts, reinforcing the idea of social mobility with the prospect of equal opportunities on the one hand, whilst simultaneously employing the symbolic language (examined in Chapters One and Three) to ensue its own place as superior from its lower-class counter-parts on the other. It is within this dialogue and between the intersecting narratives of socio-economic improvement, its projection as an over-arcing truth for all, and the discourse of middle-class distinction that the working-class male was defined, that the protagonists of, first the Angry Young Men, then the British New Wave, with their voices of ostensible political conflict emerged.

Female Identity in the Fifties

> It's hard now to evoke the sea of misogyny in which more than one generation of women struggled before the women's movement (DuPlessis and Snitow 4).

During the period immediately after the war, a struggle over the social roles of the sexes became manifest in the arena of employment. While the nation's men were away fighting, its women had occupied responsibilities in industries normally reserved for their husbands, brothers and fathers; this became a source of conflict upon the return of the latter (Bryson 126-7). Accordingly, a 'pro-family' discourse emerged, which placed a high level of importance upon maternal care, in which medical and psychological studies projected ill-effects on children deprived of this attention (Sandbrook 414); the subtext being that women who neglected this responsibility in order to work were unfit mothers. Within this discourse, a clear

ideological space was being fought for, in order that the man, or more specifically the husband, be re-established as the family breadwinner and thus regain his identity and authority as the more dominant of the sexes (Bryson 128). After the lean years of rationing subsided, a new context of growing affluence (see above), with its focus on consumerist lifestyles, provided another avenue through which this discourse could be developed. A higher standard of living produced a culture in which consumer goods, especially household items, were promoted widely and could be obtained by a wider range of society. The marketing of the latter aimed itself at the idea of the women/wife/mother of the house as homemaker, rebranding her as a 'kitchen goddess' (Sandbrook 111). This in turn played into the male's preferred sense of masculine identity, and its surrounding anxieties, by suggesting his manliness was hinged upon providing the latest technologies to make the life of his partner easier.[9] The effect of the combination of these discourses meant that household chores for the 1950's women were, as Sandbrook asserts, generally not seen as domestic drudgery but as the essential framework of family life, an occupation in which a woman could take pride (111-13). Within this emerging culture that peddled its social ideal as a perfect family: working husband, the wife, children and home, Bryson states, the appeal of feminism paled, being instead 'associated with battles long won or with values that found little support' in the contemporary focus of post war years (127). Betty Friedan emphasises this in her observation that at this point 'words like "emancipation" and "career" sounded strange and embarrassing; no one had used them for years' (16). The feminist voice, its struggle and beliefs had been usurped by competing discourses of womanhood. Friedan advances at the opening of her significant text that the prominent voice of first wave feminism had become unimportant, with little information now accessible to the general public about the ground it had gained in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century[10]:

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[9] The extent to which the feminist voice was over-taken by this new discourse is highlighted by the Hotpoint's model of washing machine, called 'The Liberator' (Sandbrook 112).

[10] This is so much the case that one contemporary theorist recently remarked: in many feminist and women writer's classes I have told the story of feminist literary theory[:] First there was Virginia Woolf. Then came 1968... (Eagleton 1-2).

'the words written for women, and the words women used when they talked to each other […] were about problems with their children, or how to keep their husbands happy' (16). What Friedan describes is that the pursuit of equal rights and independence for women had 'been displaced by an all-pervasive "feminine mystique".' And through this mystique women had been sold the belief 'that their only fulfillment lay in domesticity' (Bryson 140). The role of the beautiful, perfect housewife was advanced as the ultimate aspiration for women. Thus woman's role in relation to man and external society was, no doubt, one of subservience, but also a qualifying contribution made for her male counterpart. Evidenced by the work of de Beauvoir, the forerunner of the second wave of feminism, the role of women at this time can be read invariably as a supporting one; 'the other', whose job it was to be a point of reference, in defining the terms for man's identity. Woman 'is defined and differentiated', de Beauvoir argues, 'with reference to man … He is the Subject, he is the Absolute- she is the Other' (16). This translates to the provision of an object (herself) against which a man can understand who he is supposed to be. Woman was reduced to A) a property (herself) who is able to perform all of the behind the scenes domestic work, and B) required to remain an object of desire. These two qualities afford a point of measurement for man to define himself. He is the one who goes out to 'provide' for the family; he is the one who 'possesses' a woman who is desirable to other men. In these terms he can identify as the hero in his own social narrative.

The social conditions described above can be seen to have enabled a particular trope of masculinity in literature of this period. This is particularly apparent in the British 'Kitchen Sink' drama, the critical reception to which seems to mirror the patriarchal overtones of that which has just been described. A strong example of this can be found in John Osborne's 'ground-breaking' play, *Look Back in Anger*. Osborne's play is much quoted by theorists of class in literature, who hold it as an example of emerging class conflict: a demonstration, as Day puts it, of 'the passion banished by the middle class return[ing], as upwardly mobile members of the working class enter its ranks (185). The importance of women as a mere device

by which the male protagonist is understood claims little space. Ian Haywood asserts the play's importance in terms similar to Day, as a text examining class identity. He suggests its protagonist, Jimmy Porter, is 'liberated through social mobility from the old vocabulary of class struggle,' reacting in turn to the 'sterile conformity' of his new class. It is interesting that, while Haywood is at pains to champion Porter as the 'pioneer of a new generation of aggressive working class heroes' (95), he gives scant mention, from a contemporary perspective, to the misogyny that is pervasive feature of the play. Even a perfunctory analysis of the text displays that which is starkly over-looked. The opening scene involves two men: Jimmy Porter and Cliff both reading the paper, while the only woman, Jimmy's wife Allison, is ironing. This does not alter through the whole of Act One, which contains Jimmy disparaging Allison's background, (lack of) intelligence, and passivity; he even asserts that her ironing is ruining his experience of a radio show. Act Two sees the entrance of another female: Helena – confident, strong-willed and able to stand up to Porter. On learning Allison is pregnant, and after confrontations between herself and Porter, Helena arranges an escape for Allison back to her parental home. In this scene Helena displays the potential to problematize the existing gendered power structure of the household. However, on Allison's departure, she falls upon Porter with flailing affection. In Act Three Helena has now taken the place of Allison, in a scene which replicates the play's opening. Having been stripped of (or voluntarily forfeited) her previous resilience, Helena is now apologetic and responds submissively to the jibes of Porter. Helena's negation of her feminist potential, found in the second act, means any challenge to the existing hierarchy has been extinguished. She demonstrates de Beauvoir's assertion of feminine complicity with the patriarchal rule. But also the suggestion that without widespread knowledge of new women's rights resistance was more unlikely. As it is, the role of the female in this play is one which serves the masterly and authoritative masculinity of Porter, and his message of political struggle (which remains stagnant). When Allison returns, having miscarried her baby, the resulting stand off between the two women reveals that Porter's dominating character is

smothering for them both. However, this is something which is accepted, rather than challenged. Their conversation betrays that any contention of Porter's authority will never manifest. When Helen finally flees, it is not a liberating act of feminist rebellion, but rather because her adulterous circumstance is inconsistent with her religious beliefs. Her void is immediately filled by the returning Allison, who once more assumes the submissive position from which she has been too weak to fully escape.

These politics embodied by the working class-male in Osborne's text can be read as privileged over any serious questions of the treatment of women.[11] Moreover, these politics can be seen as reflecting the overarching patriarchy which disqualified the female voice from its concerns. This is reproduced by both the critical appraisal of Osborne's work and its status within the political commentary of 'The Angry Young Men' movement (and latterly its absorption by the British New Wave). The mere title of the Angry Young Men movement pre-supposes a politics embodied by men, and by virtue is prone to highlighting masculine concerns of identity in ways typified by the established patriarchal order. This will now be developed in readings of a selection of British New Wave texts, which will advance the inextricable link, in literary representations, between the sexualization of the working-class male body and its 'uses' of its female counterpart.

Introducing the Three Types of Masculine Representation

Having established the ideological and economic terms by which a male lower-class protagonist of this era has been produced, this first short section will outline the response of three separate masculine identities to their subject positions, before going on in the following section to establish the terms in which these take place in comparison to one another.

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[11] In Fact, The latter is read as 'vituperative humour', as Haywood briefly states: is a means of 'consolation by converting class-consciousness into sexism' (94).

The Muscle Bound Fighting Machine

In line with Marx's theory (Chapter One) *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*'s Arthur Seaton is part of an alienated workforce. His body is his sole means of survival, which he employs in the operation of machinery at a local bicycle factory. He is aware of the capitalist economic structure which has placed him there, and is ambivalent, talking acrimoniously of those in power as 'big fat Tory bastards' and 'Labour bleeders' (Sillitoe 35-6). Conversely, he is aware also of the recent boom in material circumstance fuelled by the same economy, and the resultant (and relative) privileges it provides, in line with those outlined in the above section. He is able to afford an array of smart clothes to be seen in at the weekend, and enough cash to buy himself and a female companion the alcohol of their choice at the public house. An illustration of this stark shift in the economy is exemplified in his pleasure on behalf of his father, who:

> was happy at last […] after all the years before the war on the dole […] and the big misery that went with no money and no way of getting any. And now had a sit-down job at the factory, all the Woodbines he could smoke, money for a pint […] and a television-set to look into at home. (Sillitoe 27)

Seaton views his position through the lens of the normalized socio-symbolic system, which as discussed in sections Chapters One and Three, apportions greater value to roles performed by the mind. However, he feels its unjust treatment, telling himself, 'I'm as good as anybody else in the world' (Sillitoe 35). He is, along with the manual labourers of Chapter Two, almost imprisoned within a structure that regulates his masculine performance, and unable to acquire identity from the more powerful sites of wider social institutions; he thus seeks escape. This escape is not, however, found in attempts to elevate his material circumstances – for which there is little opportunity, but rather by taking what he can get from within them. His limited

vocabulary of masculine performance encapsulates what Collinson and Hearn describe as the typical lower-class response: he drinks hard, he displays violence toward other men in public houses (Sillitoe 11, 106), is a misogynist (this will be examined in more detail below) and even shoots his neighbour with an air rifle when she challenges his behavior (Sillitoe 118); 'It's a hard life,' goes Seaton's refrain, 'if you don't weaken' (Sillitoe 202). These actions locate him as the archetypical fighting machine, whose strength, daring, and 'common sense', in response to his economic culture, set him apart from other men. His place in society is not one from which to ascend socially, but one rather which justifies his reactions to it in specific ways.

Billy the Wit

Waterhouse's Billy Fisher sells his labour at a local undertaker's, and spends his time imagining himself as a hero, or creator of various comic or literary masterpieces (these fantasies he terms his number one thinking). This device is displayed throughout his story as a means of escaping the reality of his circumstances. However, unlike Seaton, these are not pipe dreams, but a line through which he can establish himself as above his class, through fame, success, superior wit (and even grammar). What is more, Fisher aspires to this different life; he wants to become a scriptwriter, and expends most of his waking hours planning and dreaming about it (Waterhouse 7). This locates him within the bourgeois project of self-improvement, noted in Chapter One. Fisher demonstrates throughout an awareness of economic and cultural distinctions and an opinion on his position within them, as well as knowledge of the disparate generational worldviews between himself and his parents, which exemplify those of the discourse of the teenager noted in Sandbrook.[12] A prime example is displayed here through one of his regular routines with his friend and sidekick Arthur,

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[12] 'The teenager,' writes Sandbrook, 'was therefore a creation of affluence, and many older people found the image of the teenager as a carefree, profligate big spender to be a shocking rebuke to their own values of thrift and caution' (Sandbrook 437).

> As we begun to walk down St Botolph's Passage, Arthur struck up:
> 'Ther's allus been an Olroyd at Olroyd's mill and ther allus will be.
> Now come 'ere with your college ways and you want none of it!'
>   But father! We must all live our lives according to our lights –' I
> began in the high-pitched university voice.
>   'Don't gi' me any o' yon fancy talk' said Arthur, reflecting with
> suspicious accuracy the tone of the old man at breakfast.' You broke
> your mother's heart, lad. Do you know that? (Waterhouse 31)

Fisher, akin to Edley's and Weatherall's Intelligent Wit, employs pastiches, humorous routines and sarcasm to disparage his immediate surroundings and, as Haywood notes, reduce 'working class life to a series of comic stereotypes' (113). He speaks derisively of his family, his employers, and most parts of the town in which he lives. A first reading of this behavior shows a response, perhaps typical of young people new to their position as 'Teenagers', and their experience of new affluence, in contrast to the ingrained views of austerity in the previous generation (Sandbrook 48). A second reading, with focus on Fisher's derision of his social position, can be read in parallel with the shift in social discourse, observed by Crompton and Day (in Chapter One), brought about by capitalism and new technologies, and which saw the emergence of an Individual, who in the new socio-political climate saw opportunities for advancement which were not available or apparent for previous generations. These two readings operate as a resource for each other. The relationship between them articulates a culture within which new discourses were rupturing opportunities for the young to dream of breaking away from their prescribed traditional life chances. The disparagement of both his employers, ('Shadrack and Duxbury's was as dull and comfortable as offices go'; Waterhouse 19), and his town and its provisions for the young, ('The Kit-Kat bar was another example of Stradhoughton moving with the times, or rather dragging its wooden leg about five paces behind'; Waterhouse 33) displays his attempt to distance himself from or elevate himself above his environment, through posturing a disposition of higher value. In so doing, Fisher firmly attempts to align himself with the values of the bourgeoisie, distinguishing himself from the class from which he springs. He, as an individual in a new political climate, believes he is

worth more and, following the example of the bourgeoisie, attempts to differentiate himself, through drawing a language of moral worth between himself and those who are lower.

Joe's Ruthless Pursuit of the Top

Joe Lampton is the exception in these three character samples. His fictional trajectory is set at the end of the 1940s, making him almost a preface to Billy Fisher and Arthur Seaton. Lampton narrates his story in the late fifties, not as an angry young men, but as a now wealthy, impeccably turned out gentleman ten years into the future (the point which Fisher and Seaton exist in their own narratives); a point from which he has found money, success and a higher place within society (Braine 7). His narration retrospectively traces his naked ambition, and ultimate success in transforming his place in society. His interests are solely in material wealth and status, an illustration of which can be found as he recalls unpacking his belongings, having moved away from his predominantly working-class town. The correlative of his ambition is displayed in the object of a dressing gown:

> When she'd [Mrs Thompson] left the room I opened my suitcase and unfolded my dressing gown. I'd never had one before; Aunt Emily thought not only that they were an extravagance […] I seemed to hear her voice, 'I'd sooner see someone naked,' she'd say. ' working people look daft in dressing gowns […] spend your money on something sensible, lad.' I smiled; there was nothing sensible about the garment. (Braine 13)

In this passage, Lampton postures himself as separate from and above those he has left behind. Along with Fisher, his progress as an 'individual' is measured against the old discourse owned by his Aunt, who knew her place. The objective correlative of the dressing gown illustrates a flagrant disregard for the 'traditional social structure', symbolizing in its 'extravagance' his inherent sense of entitlement to things conventionally placed out of the reach of his kind. Like Arthur Seaton, Lampton feels no loyalty to a social system, which he imagines is set up to exclude those such as himself (Braine 28). However, unlike the former, his identity and social

status will be contained in his ability to acquire things (economic capital), and moreover, his existing knowledge of how to use them (cultural capital). It is as if Lampton imagines that he is already a rich capitalist with the correct disposition to carry his cultural and social status, unjustly trapped in the position of a lower class subject. For him, it is not so much about self-improvement, but finding a root to his natural habitat. This is well demonstrated in Lampton's reminiscence of an experience early in his journey. His seat at a tearoom window discloses the scene of a rich young man exiting his Aston-Martin with a beautiful girl. Lampton muses,

> the ownership of the Aston-Martin automatically placed the young man in a social class far above mine. The girl […] was as far beyond my reach as the car. But her ownership, too, was simply a question of money'. [This is quickly supplemented by his assertion that,] 'these were my rights, I felt, a signed and sealed legacy. (Braine 28)

Lampton demonstrates an innate sense of displacement, imagining his aesthetic disposition separates him from the others in the class in which he begins. In opposition to the ambitions of Fisher's project of improvement, he does not as such aspire, or attempt to earn a higher place in society; instead he demonstrates a sense of entitlement to its lifestyle, which can be attained through transporting himself, as he is, from one position to another.

The three examples of masculinity above display an interesting lineage. The three characters which embody these examples are lower-class by birth. In addition to the muscle-bound fighting machine, the witty intellectual and the man with impeccable manners providing respective personal traits in line with the first quality necessary for a 'believable life' (see Chapter Five), each correlates with masculine characteristics typically present in the different levels of the class system. It is the different responses to their subject positions, embodied in these personal traits by the protagonists which display their individual attempts to negotiate or resist the system by which they are produced. This is important. Arthur Seaton's characterisation accurately describes a man alienated from the means of production, and

utilizing the only material means he has, his physicality, which he expresses through drinking hard, through acts of violence, and (as will be explored further below) sexual promiscuity. In relation to his 'working-class' position, his only means of dominance or agency is to essentially be even more stereotypically working-class, as defined by the middle-class gaze, than his neighbour. Counter-intuitively, there is a tragedy of impotence here. Fisher's ethos of self-improvement (he has a grammar school scholarship education) and his employment of wit, and culture (he quotes William Blake, makes fun of his employer's mis-use of words) is an attempt to distinguish himself from his low economic background, akin to the values of bourgeois identity. In order to gain a higher social standing, he subscribes to the framework which privileges mind over body and, in so doing, does not resist or reject the economic and socio-symbolic systems, but embraces and tries to use them to his advantage. Joe Lampton, from the point he narrates, is now fully adjusted and situated within a moneyed, property-owning class. He displays all of the material wealth, power and knowledge understood and accepted within the socio-symbolic economy through which he is read. Therefore, his 'working-class' narrative, and the role he plays as the primary example of lower-class maleness (in the British New Wave) becomes something more striking. A respectable businessman, re-telling the story of his lower-class, younger self, he is transformed into both the subject, and subjectifier of the lower-class protagonist. Separate from his former self, both behaviorally and socially, but still historically tied, he is able to author a working-class protagonist, who fulfills the object/subject role which becomes a source of entertainment and moreover, fetishization for the middle-class gaze. Within this process he embodies both sides of Skeggs's theory (displayed in Chapters One and Three). He creates a working-class body, a site onto which he projects all that is immoral, sexual and dangerous, and employs the distinguishing ten years between he and this body as a distancing device, through which his new self can sit alongside the privileged in justification. This further cements his new territory amongst those to whom he always desired to (and knew he did) belong.

What is of further interest is that without having entered into the middle-class place he now inhabits, it is questionable whether Lampton's story would have had the same platform. The currency of his contemporary position means that he speaks more as judge than judged, and it is in revealing his salacious past from a position superior to it that affords him the space to relay these experiences. If this is true, then it follows that it is possible that Lampton's process also makes accessible in-roads into other 'baser' representations of his class to the same readership. Similar to Stuart Hall's argument that black actor Paul Robeson served to initiate black actors into white Hollywood culture (254-6), Lampton's embodiment of both fetishized and fetishizer achieves the same outcome for Arthur Seaton and Billy Fisher. This occurs not in the attitudes they display to their subject positions, nor their responses, which manifest disparately in their 'stand out qualities', but in the aspect which binds them together: Sean Nixon's theory of the overwhelming emphasis on penetrative sex (expressed above). This articulates itself through the second quality of characterisation, which will now be examined.

Exchange of The Working Class Male Body: Sexual Potency as Class Weapon

Having established above the response made by the three masculinities to their respective subject positions, the mode through which these responses receive their full articulation will be explored through, what Ava Baron theorizes as, the act of the spectatorship of the middle-class gaze as the eroticization of the male working class body. (Chapter Five) This section will examine the materialization of this theory in the relationship of the masculine lower-class protagonist to the female, and moreover how this constitutes the masculine identity upon which the class response/ resistance of each subject of this section is hinged.

In the young Lampton we see all of the characteristics of masculinity outlined above by Nixon (in Chapter Five). His ruthless ambition and need to place himself alongside men of a higher status, exemplified in the extract above, finds its main expression within his ability to perform

sexually. Wealth and sexual interest go hand-in-hand, exemplified by Lampton's 'grading scheme for women':

> The grades corresponded, naturally, with the income of husband or fiancé, running from One, for millionaires and film stars and dictators – anyone with an income over £20,000 in fact – to Twelve for those under £350 […]
> (Braine 37)

As explained in the previous section, Lampton posits himself as dispossessed from the economic wealth and social position to which he imagines he is entitled. Wealth and status need not be earned, but realized through transportation. His affairs with the married Alice and the young wealthy Susan, can be read as the vehicle through which this transcendence takes place, and through which he can stake his claim, proving himself against masculine competition of the higher social order. As Ian Haywood states, 'Sex [was] his most powerful weapon' (98), and Lampton's progress should be seen as a battle of hyper- hetero-normative masculinity in which he ascends to his rightful economic and social place through libidinal power. His move to take 'Alice' from her partner demonstrates Lampton's strength and superiority over the 'economically and culturally stable', establishing the first step up on the social ladder; while his plan for full ascension rests, as Haywood asserts, on the sexual possession of the rich capitalist's daughter Susan Brown (97).

Lampton's shrewd and aggressive use of his masculine prowess provides the only means for a narrative of escape. His physique, his looks, and above all his sexual enterprise are the keys to his advancement: 'the sexual battery he uses to penetrate the fortress of the propertied classes,' as Haywood puts it (96), does not meet 'middle-class' values on their own terms. Instead Lampton creates his own usurping agenda: he employs his mind to negotiate space in the system of bourgeois respectability to his advantage. After he sexually possesses Susan, she falls pregnant and they are forced to marry. The low subject position he inhabits is not compatible with the status of the daughter of such a wealthy respectable businessman, and so

Susan's father is forced to award Lampton a prestigious place in the family business. This transposition provides him with the economic means and access to cultural capital from which he can build his new identity.

This hyper-hetero-normative masculinity takes form in the similar sexual misadventures of Arthur Seaton, and in the compulsive two-timing courtship of Billy Fisher, though to slightly different ends in each. John Kirk notes the disparity between Seaton's and Lampton's relations to class (69), stating that, in contrast to Lampton, the former 'implicitly accepts that he is a cog in the machine ' (70). However, this does not mean he benignly welcomes what he is given: in contrast, Kirk continues: 'the boy is equally aware of his exploitation by the powerful.' The result is a narrative of 'revolt against authority'. This reading is valid: Kirk outlines Seaton's internalised conflict due to the relative confidence he gains from affluence created by the structure against which he kicks (70-5). Seaton is trapped in a capitalist system from which he cannot, and perhaps would not try to ascend. For not only does he lack the economic and personal properties required to succeed in bourgeois society, but also he fears in stepping outside the system he may forfeit the consumer practices through which, as shown in the previous section, his current lifestyle is funded. In response to this frustration, Seaton (in addition to drinking and fighting) exploits his vigorous sexual appetites. These establish for him a masculine identity, which counters the impotence he feels in the wider capitalist system, whilst still affording him the material benefits of remaining part of it.

Akin to Lampton, Seaton embarks upon an illicit relationship with a married woman, Brenda – wife (and mother of two children) to one of his work colleagues. His attitude towards Brenda's husband Jack is exposed by his musings on two classifications, as he sees it, of husband: 'those that look after their wives, and those that [a]re slow' (Sillitoe 44). One scene displays Seaton, after sex, sinking contentedly into Brenda's and Jack's marital bed, whilst playfully chatting to one of her children. Next he is in the kitchen eating a breakfast she has prepared for him, while he jokes and Brenda pours him more tea (Sillitoe 20-2). Seaton also

engages in a short-term affair with Brenda's married sister Winnie, while her husband serves in the army. During his relationship with both sisters, his postulations on marriage are divulged:

> If I ever get married, he thought, and have a wife that carries on like Brenda and Winnie carry on, I'll give her the biggest pasting any woman ever had. I'd kill her. My wife'll have to look after any kids I fill her with, keep the house spotless. And if she's good at that I might let her go to the pictures now and again and take her out for a drink on Saturdays. (Sillitoe 145-6)

Seaton equates masculinity and the role of the husband with an ability to 'keep your woman in check', and thus sees no reason to pity a husband, too slow not to be outdone by his prowess. The play of power between husband and wife, demonstrated by his thoughts, displays his clear patriarchal position, one which is rooted in the theory that the working-class man, disenfranchised from his work, seeks to exert mastery at home in lieu of any authority at the site of the former (Collinson and Hearn, '"Men" at "Work"', 66-8). This is all the more important when applied to Seaton's current single status. It is clear that he employs his relationship with these married women as a further device through which he can establish masculine dominance. However, unlike the stereotypical man who dominates his wife and children, Seaton dominates someone else's household, and thus also its patriarchal head. This can be read as a means of ascendency from his subject position, whilst remaining firmly in his social circumstance. The freedom his dominance over women and their husbands afford him is twofold: firstly, it allows him to identify with a privileged position of masculine authority, usually reserved for those who rule over him in the capitalist hierarchy of employment; second, it is symbolic of his previously stated conflict with the system: the institution of marriage is part of a middle-class value system, (articulated as a source of economic control by Engels above) which he mocks, through the dominance expressed above. This functions, along with his other vices, to create space for a form of rebellion and escapism: a mental and physical

distraction from the mendacity of his week long grind, but one that doesn't preclude its benefits or exempt him from the circularity of the system, a circularity expressed in the juxtaposition of the excitement of Saturday night, when, through indulgence in alcohol and sex, 'the effect of a week's monotonous graft in the factory [i]s swilled out of your system, (Sillitoe 9), with the 'black and wicked' feeling of 'Black Monday,' when 'the big grind [starts] all over again.' (Sillitoe 24)

Seaton's rebellion is a kick against the established order which firmly situates him as a labour worker. His behaviour creates for him a masculine identity in which he is smartly dressed, the hardest drinker, a tough man about town and sexually superior to his peers. However the comfort of this lifestyle is funded, at large, by his position as an employee within capitalist production, and the relative expendable income it creates. Thus the ecstasy of his temporary identity, and the freedom this purchases him on a Saturday night, is deflated by the reality of his lowly position on a Monday morning.

Billy Fisher's endeavours are less dangerous (Seaton later gets turned over by a vengeful attack (174-5). But he is still extreme in his vices; he too has two girls under his control. He is almost self-destructive in juggling them, both of whom he is engaged to wed. Motives akin to those of Seaton explain, in part, the effort he exerts in order to execute these actions: an assertion of masculinity through control over the opposite sex, which postures him as an alpha male. This is very clear in relation to Rita. She is described as 'Miss Stradhoughton' and is frequently coveted by other men (Waterhouse 36). In owning her through engagement, Fisher places himself as the subject of envy of his male contemporaries. His predominant mission with regard to Barbara is to take her virginity. This is an activity he vehemently pursues with what are described as 'passion pills', a pill apparently designed to amplify involuntarily the libido of its consumer (Waterhouse 43). He slips these pills, like a date rapist, to Barbara at every conceivable juncture in order to coerce her into sex. This attempt to deflower Barbara further exposes Fisher's kinship with Seaton in asserting manhood through sexual victory over women.

His amorous cause, however, deviates from Seaton in its relevance to a wider response to his subject position. Firstly, he doesn't express any evidence of affection for either of his girls; he mocks the pair of them as he navigates one ring between them. Rita, who works at the Kit-Kat bar, according to Fisher, speaks 'as if she got her words out of a slot machine' (Waterhouse 36), and Barbara, dubbed by him throughout as 'The Witch', he describes thus:

> I had learned to dislike everything about her. I did not care, to begin with, for her face: the scrubbed, honest look, as healthy as porridge. I disliked her for her impeccable shorthand, her senseless, sensible shoes, and her handbag crammed with oranges. (Waterhouse 42)

This could be read as an effort to entertain himself while he waits for his talent to guide him to London and to an employment with more social acclaim. These girls, it could be argued, provide a means of escape, until this happens, from the drudgery of his position through sexual adventure. However, a closer reading, in relation to the interests of this thesis, proves more interesting. Relationships to women, for Fisher, mirror the way that he relates to the rest of his 'class'. His disdain for them as subjects deserving of respect runs parallel to the Bourdieusian lines of aesthetic distinction drawn by the bourgeoisie to distinguish its value from the lower orders. 'Rita' is excluded from Fisher's status by her apparent lack of imagination, specifically (as demonstrated above) in her use of language - a root which can be traced to Bourdieu's example with respect to art, quoted in Chapter One. The fact that Rita employs commonplace or clichéd sound bites in order to illustrate her responses to people or situations displays, for Fisher, an unconsidered gut response, not processed by the mind, and thus is not articulated in a manner that can be considered original or cultivated. Without the means to express herself sufficiently she is judged as possessing less worth than the witty Fisher himself. 'The Witch' is divested of status on account of her lack of intrinsic knowledge of how to use possessions. This matter of taste relates to notion theorization of the possessive individual, theorized earlier. Furthermore, Fisher's distinguishing dominance and constant ability to outwit his two fiancées

is itself an exhortation of his mind over their bodies. The intelligent games he plays in order to possess the bodies of these two 'lower-class' females becomes an illustration of Marx's theory of the capitalist structure itself (Chapter One). The '*labour* of love' to which these two subject themselves becomes a commodity that accumulates an elevating capital by which Fisher's identity is distinguished.

Marriage: The Use and Abuse of an Institution of Middle-Class Values

There is, then, overwhelming evidence of the thread of Nixon's stereotypical traits running through Edley's and Wetherall's masculine types, which are located in the above characters. As has been shown, Lampton's characteristics afford him a route out of his original class position. Seaton and Fisher employ their respective types of masculinity (the muscle-bound fighting machine, the wit) alongside their sexuality as a means of negotiating a space, and establishing a dominant identity – physical and mental, whilst they remain in their lower class spheres. What is clear here is that the male body, in its fetishized, sexualized form is seen as a site of potential class conflict, while it also affirms the stereotypical masculine traits of hegemonic dominance over other men, and over women. The latter, in the masculine representations of the British New Wave, employs women as a point of reference, reflective of their (sexualized) responses to their place in the socio-economic system. All three characters embody the potential for some form of defiance, which correlates to the opposite sex. However, the outcome for Lampton is starkly contrasted by that of his descendants, Fisher and Seaton. On examination, the main role played by the opposite sex is in the representation of potential for marriage and thus a synecdoche of the middle-class value system.[13] This is located at a point in the British twentieth century when the institution of marriage was seen as a right of passage into 'moral' adulthood (Sandbrook 435). But the point at which the competing discourse of adolescence functioned to make young adults aware of the limits 'adulthood' placed upon the potential to enjoy new

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[13] Recalling Chapter Two, the advent of marriage as a means to control and retain wealth was implemented by the bourgeoisie at the advent of capitalism

experiences as an individual (Sandbrook 435-7). Moreover, 'youth' within the discourse of affluence operated as a shorthand for social change and the break from old traditional values (Lacey 25). For the young lower-classes, a new opportunity was presented: the means to earn money in a capitalist system, and use it as a source of constructing an identity through consuming objects and a source of acquiring new experiences which may rupture different life paths. The passage into adult responsibility meant, in terms of supporting a family, that the way that these young people lived and consumed would have to be largely forfeited - a house, a mortgage, clothing and food for a family, would all be required and thus their responsibilities would be greater, and their relationship to this capitalist system would alter. In place of their potential to exploit it – as responsibility-free youths, they would become reliant upon it. New opportunities of identity and life paths would be conceded, and their positions in the system fixed, finalized, and nonnegotiable. The forfeiting of youth to adulthood would equate to the loss of inclusion in the discourse of social change. The result of which, as has been displayed in Chapter Two, would be a consolidated loss of masculine identity to their superiors in the capitalist system at large, with less prospects of escape. Therefore the institution of marriage, which relates to adulthood and thus responsible places within the capitalist system can be read, within the discourse of youthful affluence, as a potential pitfall. Reactions to marriage and its impact on the individual are contrasted in the lives of the three protagonists. Lampton's response is the ruthless pursuit of the richest girl in town, Susan Brown, which sees her eventual impregnation. Seaton and Fisher's respective responses are ostentatious displays of masculine bravado in the performance of polygamous relationships with females. These are able, for a time, to control or mock the system which seeks to restrict their identities.

The concluding chapters of each novel see a move towards marriage for each character. What is interesting, however, is the stark difference in the meaning of this for Lampton, in contrast to his descendants, Fisher and Seaton. Lampton's matrimonial state comes as a result of his aggressive mission with respect to Susan, and therefore occurs on his own terms. The

materialization of his ambitions comes as he establishes a narrative whereby his masculinity controls the middle-class value system, rather than becoming subject to it. In using his mind to control the body of his female counterpart, and thus the institution representing this value system, he is rooted firmly within the acceptable arena of the bourgeoisie. In contrast, both Fisher's and Seaton's concluding positions, take place at the surprise emergences of a third female party. In their respective stories, each appears unable to resist this surprise love interest, whose effect is to alter their behaviour radically. This can be seen as submission of their overt, stereotypical masculinity-types to the same system over which Lampton claims his victory. Seaton resolves to tame his rebellious self, with a display of self-control, both in terms of drinking and promiscuity (Sillitoe 207); Fisher absconds dramatically from his two 'fiancées', and arranges to meet his 'real love', Lizzie, to catch a train out of town (Waterhouse Chapter 11). Both of these can be taken as failures to sustain the radical masculine potentials set out for the protagonists. This is supported in Seaton's case by the 'Saturday Night/ Sunday Morning' division of his narrative, and his description of both. Saturday night, as seen above, is featured as an escape from the drudgery of work and the combat with the industry of the week, and involves numerous small victories of masculine identity over the bourgeois capitalist system. He equates Sunday to the placidity of the Lord's Day Observance Society. A platonic day of self-sacrifice, a bowing of the knee in reverence to a higher power, before returning to a week of hard graft. It is almost worse than the working week itself, he says, because in the latter there are at least signs of life (Sillitoe 146). Seaton's body is sexualised in the larger section of the novel, under the title 'Saturday Night', an identity onto which all immorality is projected. His new identity, as 'Doreen's young man', is introduced at the beginning of the short section of the novel entitled 'Sunday Morning'. Fisher's failure comes as Lizzie, at the last minute, refuses to journey with him out of town and he lacks the courage to leave her behind (Waterhouse 156-8). Heart-broken, he turns his back on the life in London, and the place of higher social status set in front out him, and skulks back to his position in lower-class

Stradhoughton, which he has spent the whole narrative attempting to resist. The device initially employed to weigh each character's masculine resistance, does so in the end by exposing (in the case of Fisher and Seaton) its weakness. The individualist (sexualized) manhood, which negotiates space for its identity against the structure that seeks to own it, is eventually conceded in both cases to the system against which it kicked. This renders the site of the protagonist impotent of its potential threat, and its place as subservient to the existing social system is cemented.

Conclusion: The Victory of Bourgeois Values

Lampton's victory is in an acquisition of a status admired by the middle-classes, and one to which he felt he always belonged. His eventual achievement is entry, on his own terms, into the respectable social institution of marriage and lucrative capitalist business. The respective narratives of Fisher and Seaton, read beside the masculine victory of Lampton, are displays of class resistance through dominant expressions of masculinity, and thus attempts at playing the role of the individual, which ultimately fail. Fisher's endeavour to earn a higher position in society through employing all the socio-symbolic features used by the bourgeoisie to exercise control is scuppered by an intrinsic lack of drive, which sees him unable to make the journey (to London), and eventually submit to his prescribed place in the social order. Seaton's attempt to use the capitalist structure of employment to fund a consumer driven lifestyle as an individual, dominant male, is seen to be unsustainable against the power of the regulatory system of middle-class values. Consequently, a reading of all three characters articulates a particular message of over-riding subscription to the pre-existing socio-symbolic order: a place for the lower-classes in the bourgeoisie cannot be earned, nor can its structure of economic production be resisted. Lampton's success is hinged upon his disposition and an ability to intelligently deploy the same overt masculinity as Fisher and Seaton, but to an end which correlates to the original bourgeois display of drive, ambition and the means to carve out a new

social role for itself (Chapter One and Three). In his demonstration of this disposition he displays an acceptable individualized nature, in tune with the values upon which the middle-class was established. The contestation that takes place in the narratives of Fisher and Seaton does so within the parameters of established capitalism. Attempts at either earning a higher social status or rebelling against it are shown by their respective failures to be impossible. What is established then is a discourse which perpetuates the notion, displayed throughout Section One of this thesis, that economic inequality is normal, and displayed through natural social divisions which manifest in 'telling' cultural behaviours, that are intrinsic properties of an individual. Audience entertainment at the spectacle of these sexualized male bodies becomes part of the distancing device between the spheres of social behavior. Furthermore, the sequence of events within the three narratives poses no challenge to the established gaze of the reader. Thus each work of fiction becomes a vehicle for normalization, which sustains the privilege of middle-class identity in social discourse.

7. Masculinity as Class Politics in Contemporary British Literature

Introduction

Having developed an analysis in the previous section of how representation of the working-class male body is employed in the fiction of the British New Wave, this section will take as its focus three working-class protagonists of the literature of the Thatcherite neo-liberal epoch. It will begin with a brief outline of political and economical context, which as argued in Chapter 5 produces the ground on which this characterisation of these protagonists can take place. It will then employ a depiction by middle-class author, Martin Amis, which serves to mirror the current social ideology, as a means of understanding a cultural shift in the reading of the performance of lower-class men. The discussion this narrative has generated amongst class theorist, Lawrence Driscoll and postmodern feminist, Emma Parker will be used to advance a new framework on the reading of subsequent working-class protagonists. With respect to this framework, two latter narratives will be read alongside each other and also alongside the body of work examined in the last chapter. In contrasting these masculinities to those of the British New Wave, examples will be drawn of how new meanings of the lower-class male body has been deployed in literature. Lastly, a theory which traces a lineage from the New Wave novels through to the contemporary, with reference to the changes of political climate outlined will be advanced. This theory will begin to examine the legitimacy of representations of the working-class male body in mainstream narrative, and provide a platform for subsequent discussion.

The Emergent Discourse of Neo-liberalism: A Re-positioning of the Lower-Class

'In the 1970s,' Rani Shankardass states, 'the post-war generation had reached maturity,' and the issues raised and feared by Fisher and Seaton of a capitalist system's monopoly over the life of the individual subject (see latter sections of Chapter Six), were now theirs to solve. The problems of livelihood, family rearings [and] decent services and amenities, were thrust upon a

generation which also found its country in unstable economic circumstances (Shankardass 2856). The crisis of the 1970s, that saw blame for its economic instability laid on the 'failure' of the welfare state and Keynesian systems of intervention, had birthed an opportunity for the reactionary politics of the right' (Overbeek 39-40).[14] This discontent embedded within society enabled a new right wing discourse of neoliberalism (Shankardass 2849-58). In contrast to Keynsian political thought, 'Neo-liberalism' spear-headed by Thatcher in 1979 (Cannadine 175), 'propose[d],' Crompton says, 'that human well-being [could] be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade' (Harvey in Crompton 86). Consequently, the Conservative Party 'roll[ed] back the state' in order to produce conditions most conducive to 'profitable private enterprise in a free economy' (Shankardass 2855). Shankardass says, 'Labour's incomes policy, the trade union influence on government policy, […] and [high] levels of public-spending, borrowing and taxation' were now seen as obstacles and that their removal was necessary to enable 'those [with] economic initiative […] to be unleashed and allowed to bloom' (2855). This achieved the creation of enterprise culture, manifested, as Sarah Franklin shows, 'through forms of consumption, individualism and property ownership […] along with […] an attack on the so-called "dependency culture"' of those reliant on the welfare state' (19). Neo-liberalism, under Thatcher, was instrumental in the continued shift, which had been taking place from community and social whole to the individual, and as such saw the basis of economic recovery in the individual's responsibilities and the individual's right to consume. (Crompton 80) In short, Thatcher saw the role of politics not in terms of class negotiation, but as the role of governing individuals, whose power to make money and to spend would revitalize the

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[14] For a detailed delineation of this process see chapter 1 of David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

infrastructure of society.[15] This operates in accordance with Skeggs' theory of the individual which had been undulating beneath the capitalist enterprise since its conception. 'The major difference at this point [being],' Skeggs observes, 'the extension of the concept of self, so the rhetoric of 'compulsory individuality [was] now seen to address all – whilst only being applicable to a few who have access to the requisite resources' (85). As was displayed in Chapter One, the capitalist field has been ever far from neutral. The system which privileges certain forms of cultural and intellectual capital, coupled with a subject's ability to accrue the right kind of experience [personality] to his/her propertied self (Chapter Three) means that a group categorized by certain valorized traits are extremely advantaged within this new system. Thus, with the advent of a crystalized, advanced version of the symbolic economy found in neo-liberalism, inequalities grew so rapidly that their they are now deemed by many to be one of its key structural properties (Harvey 16), whilst responsibility to achieve within a neo-liberal understanding of the individual, expected, as Stahl observes (2014), to embody the values of self-reliance, autonomy and independence,' fell to all (93). The nature of these politics can be read as a two-pronged assault on the lower-classes: first, a society driven towards entrepreneurial skills which the working-classes were much less likely to possess, meant that its effects were felt in the restriction of material wealth and potential life chances; second, the neoliberal field was being presented as a neutral ground for social participation, insinuating that it was the individual at fault if he/she did not successfully capitalize on this opportunity (Stahl 95). Furthermore, those who were unable to flourish within the neo-liberal system were bereft of state support. They were left shouldering 'liability' for their 'failure' to take part in 'modern' society, instead of questions being raised about their exclusion. The resulting discourse was one, as Wacquant observes, of 'new-style Darwinism, which praises the "winners" for their vigor and intelligence and vituperates the "losers" in their "struggle for [economic} life" by

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[15] Accordingly, Crompton notes 'a deliberate […] shift [of] everyday discourse into a language of neo-liberal individualistic consumerism. She provides one example in 'the privatization of the railways' and the disappearance of the 'passenger', who was replaced by the 'customer' (87).

pointing to their character flaws' (*Punishing the Poor*, 6). This process of separation of the social winners from the losers produces, for Skeggs,

> the discourse of a working-class body who is immobile, useless and redundant, who cannot, because of their location in the pathological culture, make anything of themselves [and is thus] a threat to all respectability, a danger to others and a burden on the nation. (80)

In other words, it produces the 'underclass'.

The Feminist Second Wave

> *For most young women growing up after the war there was no ready access to feminist debates and few knew anything of feminist history, for many of the ideas … have only been rediscovered since the 1970s.* (Bryson 128)

Second wave feminism, according to Bernadette Hayes et al, is undoubtedly one of 'the most profound political changes that have occurred in the advanced democracies in the postwar years' (425). Its origins are usually held to be rooted in social and educational changes of the earlier post-war era, which, Hayes et al. argue, 'moved women's reproductive and workplace roles into the public policy debate' (425). For post-materialist theorists, this shift was enabled by the relative economic security experienced within the discourse of affluence in the late fifties [See Chapter Six); as material human needs were ostensibly catered for, space was provided for the examination of social concerns, such as self-esteem and self- and political-expression (Hayes et al. 426), by which, it is argued, the feminist cause was funded. An alternative theory suggests that the major vehicle for feminism's development has been the decline of mass production (and thus largely male labour force). This saw the political issues of the mass manual male worker rendered obsolete, affording its concerns to be replaced by a politics of identity, in which feminism occupied a key position (Crompton 80). Irrespective of the cause of its genesis, the embryonic feminist second wave voice developed at a great intensity in the sixties, making use of its protest movements to raise consciousness of women's

rights to make their own decisions, independent of men (Evans 7). In France, young women disillusioned with their ascribed 'feminine' roles in the student revolts developed the first women's groups, out of which sprang French feminist theory (Thornham 40).[16] By the year 1970 a new generation of writers and theorists, who had drawn inspiration from the voices of their forbears, such as Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir, had begun to publish significant texts (Eagleton 17-20). Robin Morgan, Shulamith Firestone, Germaine Greer, Eva Figes have been noted (Thorham 30-40) as having made significant contributions which struck a chord in the mainstream (Evans 18), whilst Betty Friedan, in her book *The Feminine Mystique*, detailing 'the personal and everyday experience of women', is credited as a key player in the second wave project of consciousness-raising, 'bringing to public visibility the widespread frustration felt by her contemporaries' (Thornham 35).[17] Within the tradition of feminist literary criticism, and in terms of the interests of this thesis, Kate Millett's contribution, in *Sexual Politics*, arguably made the largest impact. After her piercing analysis of, for example, Henry Miller's *Sexus*, which she cleverly and sarcastically deconstructs, exposing the ridiculous masculine ego as abusive, misogynistic and disgusting, it would be difficult for a male protagonist to perform this aggressive type of sexual domination without having the same charges leveled at him.

The work of Millett and her contemporaries ruptured new openings for women, so that by the end of the decade, as Evans observes, 'there were networks of women in publishing [which] produced and absorbed feminist writing and provided a significant readership' (Evans 18). The feminist treatment of the social inequalities suffered by women, combined well with emerging reproductive technologies to afford new perspectives on women's choice over childbearing with women now able to choose when, or even if, to have a child (Bryson 181-4). Having been empowered to do so by feminism, they became less subject to male dominance in

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[16] French Feminism (in respect to Kristeva, Irigaray, et al) is distinguished from its Anglo-American counterparts, by its use of psychoanalytic theory (see Eagleton).

the familial order, freer of dependence financially, and given a greater breadth of opportunity in the employment market. Further to this, 'a major impact on public awareness of the extent of abuse within the home' was achieved (Bryson 177). Although there are many divergences, discrepancies and internal conflicts from within the feminist movement, its effect on the public of the 1980s were far-reaching,[18] its significance, not least for the objective of this chapter, being that male behaviour towards women was no longer able to continue unchecked.

Having laid out the shift in social perspectives, in line with Chapter Five the impact of these changes, both economic and political, will now be examined in relation to the production of representations of significant lower-class masculinities in literature under neo-liberalism.

The Impotence of the Working-Class Man: John Self, A Prophesy

This thesis has so far demonstrated how the working-class male, as represented in literature, is inextricably linked to the class system by the generalized traits which characterise his masculinity. Moreover, that his struggle in or against his subject position is overtly sexualized through his treatment of women. The Marxist view of the working-man's body, in terms of his only possession and means of survival is transposed onto his ability to perform sexually. Martin Amis's *Money* presents a striking new perspective on this, with respect to emerging discourses evidenced above. The narrative of John Self charts an interesting line across previous perspectives of the working-class male body - its aspirational and resistant properties, and contemporary representations contextualized within new discourses. This reading will begin with a discussion of Lawrence Driscoll's analysis of *Money*, and his rejection of a wider academic response that supposes its postmodern value in favour of an ideology that secures established class structure. It will then extrapolate on the theory of the vulgarized body, advanced in Chapters Two and Three, by positing a response to Emma Parker's feminist

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[18] For example by the 1980s about 40 percent of women questioned on the subject identified themselves as feminist (see Peltola, Milkie and Presser).

reading of Amis's protagonist, in order to frame the terms by which the following two texts can be examined.

John Self lives in the 1980s, a time when 'the working-class both expanded upward as they entered into the new money markets, and downward, as Thatcherism sow[ed] the first seeds of the new underclass' (Driscoll 102). He is a self-made man, a successful director of television commercials, and as such, someone who subscribes to Thatcher's ideology, that money is the great leveler, as Self himself describes: [talking to money itself] 'you're so democratic: you've got no favourites. You even things out for me and my kind' (Amis 238). In fact, Self displays exactly the type of attitude encouraged by the Thatcherite, neo-liberalist regime and by capitalism in general, and thus should be a prime candidate for social ascension. But, as Lawrence Driscoll argues, Amis lets the reader know very early on that Self is still firmly a 'loser': lower-class, uneducated (he is unable to understand Orwell's *Animal Farm*) and he will always be. This parallels the lines of distinction drawn by the bourgeoisie. The unspoken (symbolic) rules of the aestheticization of the individual proclaim that Self's identity houses none of the cultural capital required to belong to the middle-classes. This is important, as Self, in economic terms, has the potential to establish himself amongst their orders. He threatens to become one of those working-class figures characterised in the aforementioned upward expansion. However, employing the socio-symbolic values displayed by Skeggs, Lawler and Bourdieu - which establishes the superiority of those who employ the mind over the body, the framework through which Self is read leaves him firmly bereft of this opportunity. He has not the means of mind nor the cultural knowledge to take part, thus he is identified instead with the rule of the body and becomes vulnerable to a different concern often projected onto the lower-classes (see Chapter Three). Accordingly, Self is shown to be a drunk, a rapacious consumer of pornography and client of prostitutes. In short, he becomes the site of all that is detestable and immoral, but also exciting (in terms of the personification of the prohibited; see Skeggs), in the

eyes of a presumed reader who is, as has been shown by now many times over, comprised by the socio-symbolic system created by the group seeking distinction from prospective threats like Self. The complexity of Self's economic funding, his entrepreneurship against attempts to exclude him from the middle-class on grounds of aesthetics, produces the first property of successful characterisation in this narrative: he is vulgar. His vulgarity and salacious personhood is what separates him from his counterparts. Driscoll's contention of his contemporaries' readings of *Money* supports this theory. He criticizes Richard Bradford and James Diedrick for perspectives advanced in which Self is a comment not on the class system, but on the recent boom in capitalist (neo-liberal) ideology that created entrepreneurial greed (Driscoll 100). The detestability of Self is argued here to transcend class identity, and vilify 'the normative codes of class and tradition [by] embodying the degradation and material bodily principle of grotesque realism' (Driscoll 102). In contrast, Driscoll's assertion is this:

> Amis's fiction […] absorb[s] the threat posed by an increasingly large and troubled/troubling working class while simultaneously claiming a high moral ground on which to rest its middle class laurels. (100)

Driscoll opposes the idea that Amis's 'satire' could, as Jon Begley writes, 'unmask "the ideological underpinnings of Thatcherism"' (Driscoll 101). In so doing, Driscoll reaffirms the perspective which exposes the bourgeois value system at work. In the first quality of Self's successful characterisation can be found the embodiment of lower-class aspiration, necessarily vilified and shown as irreparably separate to those who belong in this arena (Driscoll 102). The flailing efforts of Self to keep up with the middle-classes socially and culturally are coupled with his filthy habits and lack of control over his bodily impulses to produce a character which stands out as unpalatable, even disgusting, to a readership whose gaze is produced by the framework of bourgeois values discussed above.

Drawing upon Elaine Showalter, Emma Parker gives a feminist/queer reading of Self's character, which makes the case that Self is a subversive entity in the feminist war against

patriarchy. Her argument counters charges of Amis' own misogyny with a reading of *Money* that suggests 'ladlit' is employed to such an extreme that it exposes the 'insecurities, panic, cold sweats, performance anxieties, and phobias which belie male bravado' (Parker 57). Parker readily concedes that Self is 'a racist, sexist homophobe, […] an unsavory figure, addicted to junk food, television, cigarettes, alcohol and sex' (55-6). But this, she says, is taken to excesses, along with his sexual degradation of woman in order to 'expose how thoroughly pornography and prostitution impoverish human relations' (57-8). Indeed, the sexual exploits of Self with his subservient Salina,[19] or a number of prostitutes each could easily have been a scene appraised by Millett in her ground-breaking text mentioned above. Furthermore, Self's only encounter with a feminist ends with a drunken sexual advance being made on his part (Amis 62). However, this perspective has been criticized as over-looking the implications of class, in favour of a postmodern analysis which contemporary academia valorizes (Driscoll 103), and in so doing subscribes to the shift from class to identity politics described in this chapter's introduction. Conversely, the political potential in Parker's analysis, with reference to the role of second wave feminism, presents a valuable angle for this thesis. That she insists Amis makes his character literally and metaphorically unattractive (Parker 59), to expose masculinity's inherent patriarchy is key; and when read alongside the body of literature above its politics shift. The salient point is not that Self's patriarchal misogyny alone is disgusting, but that its components *in general* are disgusting. Since the advent of second wave feminism, as seen above, any manifestations of abuse or objectification of women are now (rightly) impermissible in a man of decency. However, as demonstrated by Pyke (Chapter Two), the demonization of Self's particular (overt) type of dominance over women is a currency employed by the bourgeois male to his benefit in two ways. First, in siding with the feminist call for justice at the abuse of women typified by Self, the middle-class male appropriates the former's voice as a means to further distinguish himself from the lower-orders as refined and gentlemanly.

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[19] See for example page 74 of Amis, in which he makes her effectively enact a scene from what could be a pornographic movie.

Secondly, in so doing, he deflects attention away from the wider and subtler system of patriarchy, which sees the bourgeois male exert authority over women in most social arenas – occupying, as Collinson and Hearn assert, leading positions in business, government, education, and family. ('Taking the Obvious Apart, 2014) Furthermore, this practice of deflection also conceals the process by which bourgeois domination of the economy and the symbolic produces a system so restrictive for the lower-classes that it coerces this inappropriate behavior in the first place.[20] Only after this practice is established, can it be understood that the sexualized weapon displayed in the literature of the fifties, is now scapegoated as *the face* of patriarchal rule, held up as an example of immorality and thus disqualified from any positive display of masculine resistance, to the advantage of other aggressive patriarchal forms of masculinity. Therefore, a form of agency, expressed in conflict to the value system of the middle-class in the fifties, has been lost. Like Lampton, John Self wants to rise out of his class position. However, his body, though stereotypically masculinised, cannot be exploited as a sexual weapon. Unlike Seaton or Fisher, who kicked against the system symbolically through mocking the institution of marriage, Self's attempts would be illegitimate. In fact, any sexual endeavour of any kind, which falls outside the bourgeois system of values (whereby men enjoy a more subtle form of dominance), for Self, can only be read further into his hateful character. In the context of successful characterisation outlined in Chapter Five, it is clear that the second quality (possession of the woman) needed for Self to become intelligible has been taken away. This means he is reliant solely upon the first property, which as has been demonstrated, is an entirely negative trait.

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[20] As demonstrated in Chapter Two, the space for a positive masculine identity for lower-class males within capitalist employment is restricted. Presided over by other middle-class male employers, the masculine identity of the working-class male is further reduced symbolically by a framework that devalues roles ascribed purely to the body. Bereft, therefore, of any means of control over his working environment, the working-class male seeks to establish authority on a micro-level through his body, which is sexualized and exerted over women. The question, then, is whether a more positive working-class masculinity in relation to women would be one in which it emulates the polished decency of the middle-class man, glazing over wider systemic issues, or whether if both working-class men and women acknowledge themselves as disempowered victims they might establish a unity of purpose in response to a common oppressor and rupture new openings for resistance.

The combined effort of Self's villainizing first quality and the effective removal of his second means, through the social structuring of the middle-class gaze, his project of ascension is doomed from the start. Moreover, the potential of upward mobility is neutralized, leaving only a downward turn in working-class identity. This latest installment of lower-class resistance displays a genuine attempt to get ahead, scuppered, as Driscoll points out, simply by an innate lack of ability. Self's move to New York to make the blockbuster movie he is promised (a move upon which the novel is hinged), is completely eradicated. Having been stalked, had each sexual endeavor fail comically, it eventually transpires that the film opportunity is not real at all: the movie and equipment contracts signed by Self were in fact loans and debts – leaving him penniless and eventually homeless. Self is shown to be too stupid to get anywhere business-wise, and with the previous working-class artillery of sexuality removed, he would have been in a better position had he not tried. Amis's representation of the working-class male is akin to that of Fisher and Seaton, in that Self's journey ends in a worse destination than the position he was in before he took it. He cannot compete within this system nor resist it for long. However, the difference is that his sexual exploits cannot provide him with any semblance of spatial negotiation. Self is, in these terms, emasculated from the beginning, impotent in the capitalist arena as well as in his resistance to it.

The line drawn by this novel, observed by Driscoll in his comments above, is one which, alongside the reign of neo-liberalist Thatcherism, effectively dissects the working class – the aspirational on one side, as seen in the protagonist of the fifties; a new 'underclass', whose own character flaws make it impossible for them to achieve, on the other (see Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor*). With the author wielding the pen, this last working-class attempt at ascension is marked by failure, and anticipates future male working-class representations. The new heightened awareness of feminist thought, discussed here and in the introduction to this chapter, distinguishes the line further. Overt sexual dominance over women is now a conclusively negative masculine trait (when expressed blatantly), as opposed to a display of

power as it was seen formerly. The new working-class male must therefore utilize skills and capital he does not possess in order to ascend the social ladder, and thus is propelled into a system in which he has no hope of competing. In other words, the threat of the aspiring, entrepreneurial lower-class is vanquished along with the body of Self (Driscoll 100). The resulting message, as Driscoll points out, is 'that once a working-class figure tries to get into the money game they are just unable to handle it' (Driscoll 100).

The Emergence of the Literary Representation of an Underclass

The disparity in representation of lower-class males between the fifties and the contemporary periods examined is not found in the typical displays of masculine characteristics. As has been demonstrated, all of the protagonists examined thus far encompass broadly the same traits regardless of era. An articulation of what is displayed in the section immediately above is found in deconstructing Simon Heffer's attempt to reconstitute class under neoliberalism: 'the respectable working class has died out,' he says, 'largely for a good reason, because it was aspirational [and has] become middle class' (Jones 7). Negating the contemporary inequality of material realities in different social groups, Heffer's statement crudely draws an ideological line perfectly: on the one side are all the *respectable* and *motivated* workers, who bought into Thatcher's politics of neo-liberal capitalism, on the other, those left in the wake of this aspirational shift who are too lazy, and are thus no longer able to be understood as a class of people. Whereas the fifties lower-class male may have been restricted to his initial class position, the same male under neoliberalism is now posited as outside or below the class system. He is literally 'under' class, as a result of his inability to become middle-class.[21] In Heffer's suggestion that aspiration and motivation are the only things required to succeed under this system, liability for his exclusion lies solely with the lazy individual who has failed to

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[21] This dynamic only serves to further stigmatize the working-class as all the successes of the working class are necessarily absorbed by the middle-class as it absorbs the successful individuals themselves, as Diane Reay states, 'Workclass plus […] success […] is not about valorization of working-classness but its erasure' (Finding or losing yourself, 2001).

achieve. In literary and symbolic terms, as the reading above suggests, this is not the case. Despite his aspiration, the individual, displayed in Self, is instead disqualified on grounds of a bourgeois aestheticization of the self, which sees him as a lower-class man, naturally bereft of the ability to employ the mind in discipline of his body. Thus his body is available only to symbolize the abject reality of his exclusion from the new neoliberal system. Conversely, it seems, the only way to get ahead is for an individual to inherently possess the symbolically correct (bourgeois) properties to enable his ascension.

In this respect, the narrative of Joe Lampton can be seen as prophetic with regard to Heffer's claim, in literature, as he moves ''aspirationally' from one social sphere to another by intelligently negotiating the middle-class value system. His sexualized embodiment of an original ability, seen as natural and inherent to the middle-classes, is his sole means of ascendance. In lieu of this ability, his immediate descendants (though they work in respectable employment) can be seen to anticipate the new class that will come be to represented by literature; they misbehave, are exoticized, but do not pose any realistic threat to the established order of things. In the same way Lampton predicates the narratives of Seaton and Fisher, the demonization of John Self can be seen to establish grounds for the abject sinners created by Irvine Welsh and John King. With a mainstream awareness of feminism and a middle-class masculine appropriation of its voice, the sexual aggression, formerly taken as strength against the system, now stains Self, and thus removes this possibility from his class artillery. What remains is the salaciously damnable and perpetual failing subject of a new lower order, as seen in the first quality of Self's characterisation. The (employed) working-class man of Seaton's and Fisher's era, with all his mischief, has given way to a literary representation of the new class, birthed in the demise of John Self. His final status: a homeless drop-out, embodies the personhood which Heffer states, 'does not usually work at all, but is sustained by the welfare state […] and 'becomes [an] underclass' (cited in Jones 7). The man of this new lower order is characterised not only by his lack of cultural capital, but by his refusal to compete with or

cooperate with a system that, as Self's narrative exposes, is set up to exclude him from the outset. Akin to that which Pyke and Skeggs articulated above, this masculine response is read through the same normalizing socio-symbolic framework against which it rebels, which serves to further distance those who embody it from the possibility of social inclusion. In this instance the rejection of this framework by any lower-class man is seen in terms of unwillingness to employ his body as a means to an income (Jones 7). Thus, pushed further from inclusion in the neo-liberal system, a young male of this status in literature's mainstream narrative has no hope of improving his life chances. As a result, the same types of masculine characteristics stated above – (A) aggression, competitiveness, and (B) emotional ineptitude and dependence upon an overriding and exclusive emphasis on penetrative sex – are transposed onto a generation who are, in terms of mainstream society, already failed masculinities. The only option available is an outright dismissal of the social rules by which they are alienated. Rather than subscribe to places of employment within the economy, as with Seaton and Fisher, the lower-class male body now finds himself compelled to seek out victories of identity within evermore licentious narratives, two of which will now be examined.

The Intelligent Wit in Exile

Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* is a prominent example of disenfranchised lower-class masculinities seeking identity outside the neo-liberalism and the capitalist system. It features multiple narrators, through which the three types of traditional manliness are articulated. Begsby is a full-blooded example of Edley's and Wetherell's fighting machine. His character manifests early on in a scene that exaggerates the actions of Seaton. Completely unprovoked, Begsby downs his pint of beer, 'then throws the empty glass fae his last pint straight ower the [pub's] balcony, in a causal backhand motion' (Welsh 79). The result of the ensuing fight sees Begsby apportion blame to a random stranger as an excuse to commit acts of violence against him (Welsh 79-81). Sickboy personifies well the man of exquisite taste and manners. He is a

charmer, who despite his involvement with drugs, is seen as 'a swashbuckling […] lovable cavalier' who can do no wrong. (Welsh 198) He excels as a lady's man, in fact, he is hardly mentioned throughout the story without a reference to a girl who he has penetrated. Perhaps the starkest example is the way he sees himself literally as a James Bond figure. Throughout his narration he converses, in his mind, with Sean Connery, who complements the exquisite Bond-style manner in which he is able to deal with each individual challenge (Welsh 28, 179). Renton, the central narrator, unmistakably embodies the 'intelligent wit', who has the ability to mock both the law – as seen in his faux-apology to a judge in court (Welsh 167), and the discourse of medicine – in his understanding yet irreverent observations of the psychoanalytic treatment that tries to 'cure' him of his addiction (Welsh 184-5). Unlike his fifties counterpart Fisher, he does not poke fun at his immediate working-class surroundings in order to distinguish himself from them, but disparages the structure of society at large, as a means to consolidate his rejection of it. That all of the masculinities observed by Edley and Wetherell perform in this arena of the underclass is important. Haywood reads them as a representation of youth's response to a dim future by 'immersion in a hedonistic, self-destructive underclass […] cut off from all conventional moral discourses' (158). In addition, this spectrum of masculine expressions can be seen to demonstrate a withdrawal from the arena of the mind altogether, and encompass solely the body as its means. In so doing, they become the full articulation of Skeggs' theory of the immoralized lower-class body (Chapter Three). The most important example of this process can be found in Renton. Whereas the characters of the British New Wave all negotiate a temporary space within mainstream society and its hierarchal employment structure, Renton permanently situates himself beneath it. His is an environment from which he will not even attempt to escape. Furthermore, he willingly embodies the salacious taboos projected onto previous lower-class generations. This is symptomatic of that which was illustrated in John Self. Bereft of potential to possess the 'right sort' of properties recognised as valuable by the middle-class gaze, the space out of which the modern representation of a lower-

class male is able to operate under capitalism, whilst remaining legitimate, is so reduced that it is almost impossible to establish a positive masculinity. Accordingly, as seen above, almost any attempt to act within the existing middle-class system produces social exclusion, ascribed onto the lower-class male as unworthiness. This unworthiness is both produced and then judged through the socio-symbolic middle-class gaze, which coerces particular forms of masculine behavior in response to the lack of power it bestows upon the working-class man. As Herbert J. Gans states, 'behind that idea [of the undeserving poor] is the power of the stereotypes expressed in it, and even more important, the structural sources and reasons for that power, which are located in the larger society' (74). This is displayed in Self's effort to ascend and ultimate relegation to the status of homelessness, and can be seen as both the genesis and the motivating force behind the rejection of society, expressed in Renton's refusal to live out his identity on terms produced by the bourgeoisie. Renton responds instead by severing connections altogether and outworking his frustrations without deference to a middle-class agent. His stance is perfectly articulated by his now famous acerbic defense of this decision: 'Choose life. Choose mortgage repayments; choose washing machines; choose cars [.] Well, I chose no tae choose life' (Welsh 187). In this passage Renton pronounces the sense of impossibility, experienced by Self (also Fisher), to know success in the socio-symbolic capitalist framework. Moreover, he establishes a rejection of Seaton's attempt to ascertain a masculine identity by his place as a consumer, in structured employment within the economy. Renton's wit and intellect are employed not as a project of self-improvement, but in the knowledge that the system does not work to the advantage of one in his subject-position. This is exemplified when Renton and his friend Spud are confronted with a job interview, initiated by the dole office and he devises a plan to 'act enthusiastic, but still fuck up the interview' (Welsh 63). He does this in order to continue receiving state benefits without actually having to contribute to the system. In contrast to previous representations, Renton's intellect and wit sets

him apart (in line with the first property of successful characterisation) in the extent to which it affords him rejection of society.

Sex is still an aspect of *Trainspotting*'s narrative, and important for the characterisation of its leading men, though it finds its expression on even more vulgar terms than in Self. The word 'cunt' is a prominent feature throughout, as is the objectification of any female described; 'it' usually replaces 'her' in discussion of women. In addition to Sickboy's amorous pursuits, and Begsby's stark misogynistic abuse of his wife,[22] Renton sees women, even a girl who has just had an abortion, in terms of a prospect for his own pleasure:

> Kelly hud jist hud the abortion last week. If ah wnet and saw her, ah'd
> be too squeamish tae fuck her […] there would still be something there,
> gunge, bits ay the thing. (Welsh 13)

These examples, explicitly the latter, locate the same masculine perspective on women that was exemplified in the protagonists of the New Wave. On the journey deeper into the novel's underworld, Renton is seen exerting this masculinity via sex with both his recently deceased brother's wife. (218-19) and with an under-aged girl. (139-141) The point here is that masculinity is still acted out sexually, is debauched and demeaning to women. But in contrast to the macho-making performances of the British New Wave, there is no potential of class conflict. The women with whom these sexual performances are acted out are not a synecdochal representation of middle-class respectability, but part of the same underclass to which Renton and his friends belong. Thus these practices can only afford further vilification in the gaze of mainstream, middle-class system, whose values they so offend. As displayed in Self, the feminist voice appropriated by the middle-class is able to scapegoat this behaviour, in order to distinguish itself and conceal its own patriarchy. The difference between Renton and his male

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[22] One chapter sees Begsby articulate his resentment of his pregnant wife faltering in her housework responsibilities. His verbalization ('Look at her; fat cunt,' he says to himself, 'Jist cause she's huvin a fuckin bairn, thinks it gies her the right tae lie around aw fuckin day.') escalates into a devastating act of violence, for which he subsequently lays blame on her (Welsh 109-10).

predecessors is the extremity of his sexual performance. The first example above displays flagrant disregard for moral codes of respect, whereas the sexual relationship he practices with a school child is obviously against the law, and moreover tantamount to paedophilia - possibly the worst sin one can commit in modern Britain (Kelly). These practices serve to engender a sexualized bodily performance of Renton's refusal to subscribe to middle-class framework of respectability, and as such further locate him outside the moral compass of contemporary Britain. In so doing, he enlivens Day's observation in which all values of the middle-class framework are rejected by an underclass, which already experiences an alienation from society (188).

The issue underpinning the whole narrative is obviously an undercurrent of drug culture, which acts as the tangible and ultimate break between Renton et al, and the lower-class protagonists who have come before. Having forfeited the possibility of success (in correct qualities of personhood) or resistance to the culture of capitalism (manifest in sexuality), Renton proceeds by establishing control over the only thing which remains: the actual means by which he is excluded. In opting for the illegality of habitual drug consumption, Renton draws his own line across the possibility of mainstream social inclusion within his body. As a new perspective on Pyke's earlier assertion (Chapter Two), Renton seeks to perform his lack of positive masculinity in a way which alienates him from acceptance within the middle-class value system. As opposed to previous masculinities, examined above, Renton does this within full knowledge that his actions will see him ostracized. As Haywood observes, his drug use is exercised with a cynical rejection of his surroundings through narcissistic imagination and humour (158). The lower-class masculine expression found initially in Fisher's project of self-improvement, becomes in the underclass a project of self-destruction. Renton, coerced into choosing to withdraw from the capitalist world of social mobility, instead internalizes the conflict, making his own body the site of his protest. Paradoxically, the power of Renton's mind, the imagination and humour observed by Haywood, on turning inwards, becomes

absorbed by a struggle articulated only on personal and bodily terms. This war within his own body consolidates his destruction as a social agent from the outside in, and in so doing articulates on a micro level the victory of the middle-class value system and neo-liberal capitalism at large.

The Nowhere-bound Fighting Machine

There is a striking similarity between Day's description of Welsh's Renton, and his articulation of John King's protagonist:

> Tom has no sense of the working class traditions of self improvement or social transformation and so his hostility to 'the money men' is diverted into violence against opposing football fans. (Day 201)

The arenas of football hooliganism and thuggery have in the same vein as Welsh's unsanitary underworld usurped the respectable establishments of work and leisure in which the same masculinities were acted out previously. King's *Football Factory* provides alternative sites of manly bravado (in organised street fights against other firms) and hierarchical struggle (within the power structure of one's own firm) in which masculine identity is constantly fought over. In one sense, King's Tommy Johnson embodies Seaton's attempt to assert masculine control over other men as a means of social ascendency, whilst remaining firmly in his working-class circumstance. Akin to Seaton, he demonstrates the mendacity of his weekly labour and the toll it takes upon his identity: 'stacking boxes five days solid takes it out of you.' He says, 'cardboard rubbing against your hands eight hours a day takes away the feeling. You go into remote control and the brain goes numb' (2). Johnson here illustrates the wider ideological process exerted over the lower-class male by the bourgeois value system, by which the mind is abandoned and the body subjected to hard labour. The value of the mind is subjugated, whilst the materiality of the body is felt to a painful extent. A Seaton-esque response is found in the heady violence of a Saturday afternoon: '[describing the build up to a confrontation] [t]here's a

rush and my body tingles. Sounds funny but it's true' (King 32). Having understood himself in sole terms of his body, it is the more positive 'alive' feeling within Johnson's physical form that flourishes in this context, and redeems the sense of loss he experiences throughout the week. Although imprisoned within a similar cyclical pattern of work and consumption, the distance, however, between Johnson and his predecessor in his physical articulation is located outside of mainstream, conventional society. Johnson, more akin to Renton, firm in the understanding that he is unable to compete in the arena of the capitalism system, sees his limited options for what they are, and decides to perform his masculinity elsewhere. Unlike Seaton whose project is to utilize his meager economic gain to fund his masculine activity within the 'normal' social setting of pubs and community, Johnson and his like-minded 'firm' find identity in a group, which together creates its own society. In reaction to their exclusion from the mainstream, they exclude everyone else. This new culture, unlike the capitalist system that so entrapped Seaton, provides access to respect and opportunity for ascendency, which can be attained through the body's ability to give and take blows, and through time and commitment to the group. The 'firm' operates its own system of classifications, from the 'younger lads' to Harris, the leader. Furthermore, it is a system in which, unlike Self's experience of society's ladder, goals are realistically achievable, via a means they already possess. Analogous to that which Collinson and Hearn depicted (in Chapter Two) Johnson and his associates employ a hyper-masculine response, focused upon, as Baron has shown (also Chapter Two), their resource of manly strength and bravado in order to establish that which cannot be attained within the wider social order. However, whilst these hyper-male responses had traditionally been enacted in the privacy of a workshop or shop floor, Johnson and his firm execute theirs in the full glare of the public eye:

> it's getting on for six when the tube we've been waiting for finally arrives. We know right away it's West Ham and the cameras are put through with bottles and before the doors open we're kicking the

windows in. The mob on board are booting the doors trying to get out
and there's the vague sound of crying from women and kids. (King 66)

In one of many scenes symbolic of Skegg's theory (Chapter Three), the status of dangerous and abject other, inscribed onto the lower-class male body, is flagrantly flaunted in the face of a mainstream society complicit in its inscription. This scene reflects the wider function of Johnson's narrative within the socio-symbolic gaze of the reader. It mirrors the fetishization of the lower-class body, as those located within the middle-class 'moral' value system are able to literally gaze upon the tangible outworking of this inscription from the moral position of their socially acceptable Saturdays. By promenading his violence in front of mainstream society, Johnson displays not only an awareness of the resultant demonization he will receive, but, as with Renton, seeks to encapsulate it within his performance; he literally embodies the fears of the bourgeoisie and its fascination with abject other. If Welsh's Renton 'ritualizes the alienation of the body by inducing a relentless cycle of narcissistic pleasure' (Haywood 158) in the privacy of self-destruction, Johnson enacts his own alienation through the external violence his does to, and in sight of, other people and his environment. Like Renton, his contemporary, Johnson chooses to present the process of his ostracization.

The role of women functions to sexualise Johnson's narrative of resistance. Accordingly, its characterisation contains a certain similarity to that which was expressed in the readings of Fisher and Seaton. He almost perfectly articulates the perspective posed above (Chapter Six) on the synecdochal role of the fifties female in representing the system of bourgeois respectability, summarizing, 'it al[ways] comes back to men against women' (King 150). The ultimate emasculation, as he sees it, is to be 'married and stitched up with kids, mortgages, visits to the in-laws, whatever' (King 104). His current freedom from the social order, that reduces his masculine potential to that of a cog in the capitalist machine, is fought out each Saturday in and around football stadiums, and this, he knows, would be forfeited in marriage and submission to middle-class values. However, this need not take place. He is wise to this potential

ensnarement: these things happen, he says, 'only if you're a cunt to start with. Nobody makes you into something you're not' (King 257), and Johnson does not identify himself as someone who is. In parallel to the conflict he expresses above, he is able to see clearly through this ploy, and vows not to be caught, apparently having learned his lesson from his predecessors. With scathing sarcasm he observes, 'the angry young men of yesteryear are […] wandering around their local homeware store trying to decide what shade of paint to buy for the baby's room' (King 53). Johnson could be speaking here directly of Fisher and Seaton. Unlike these men, who conceded to the ostensible inevitability of giving in, and as such are now only afforded a retrospective 'bit of rebelliousness [before having] grow[n] out of it and turn[ed] into nice boring citizen[s] (King 50), Johnson himself has a stronger resolve. In an attitude that parallels Renton's rejection of consumer-driven identity, he is prepared to steel himself for life against the threat posed by women, exacting control through a regime of misogyny, an example of which is found in this telling piece of pub banter: [recalling the previous night's encounter with a woman]

> She had her bedroom all kitted out with a mirror and all these different condoms to choose from, but all the packs were open and she takes out this gel and the tube's half-empty so she's been a busy girl. If we'd been playing someone tasty today I'd have left after the blowjob and got a decent night's kip. It's only Coventry so I put myself through the grinder. She was a dirty cow. (King 4)

Expressed here is the artillery executed by Johnson et al. Masculine authority over women is demonstrated, first in the way he is able to take what he pleases sexually without any emotional attachment; and second, whilst prioritizing the arena which affords him his 'subversive' freedom. In achieving this goal, control is retained over the 'trap', as he sees it, laid by the bourgeois value system, to which Seaton and Fisher both fell victim. The ability to dictate the terms of play sexually and to also make certain no damage is done to his fighting performance, displays a strategy employed to keep what he sees as the upper hand. This is a resolve, unlike that of Seaton, which he keeps consistent to the very end of the novel; the correspondence

between Johnson's perpetual violence and his misogyny towards women display no signs of cessation.

Like Renton, Johnson's is a project of self-destruction, which emulates on a micro-level the social process of control exerted over the lower-class male by the bourgeoisie. The privilege of mind over body in the middle-class socio-symbolic order reflects the interests of economically advantaged groups within capitalism. The means by which power is exercised by those with material and intellectual capacity over those who are used in production, creates an economic environment in which manual labourers and their like will always be under the command of men of higher position, who wield control in the arena of employment. The mundane work performed by the labourer is seen as less important, and so the subject is given less value, and therefore less room to exercise a positive masculinity. Furthermore, the impact of the judgements of symbolic value creates a gaze through which a moral distance, as Skeggs says, is established between those who succeed by these values and the rest, who are seen as abject, dangerous, other. Consequently, Johnson and his lower-class male associates are forced to seek alternative ways of establishing an identity, which they do by employing the physical strength and sexuality in forms of behavior within their own society, made up of rules outside of the middle-class system of respectability. What is clear is that the social order which functions to benefit wealthy men also produces the terms by which Johnson and his friends are forced to subsist. Johnson and his firm attempt to subvert this process, by embodying a rejection of these exclusive bourgeois norms and flaunting it in the public sphere, exercising a choice to visually display the exclusion. This outward representation of the symbolic violence done to them by the capitalist system is one which itself poses great risk to their physical wellbeing, as well as destroying opportunities in which they can been seen as anything other than vicious and disgusting. An almost perfect metaphor can be found in a snap-shot of a regular exchange which takes place within the confines of their own beloved Chelsea Football Club:

> always make me laugh the rich cunts who live in Stamford bridge. They
> must hate us lot coming along, messing up their Saturday afternoons
> [...] they look down their noses at the world, but it's a doddle staring
> them out. Every single time they look away. (King 41)

Johnson's 'victory' here is symbolic, and at best is a momentary one. Realistically, it is one

which affords no actual change in life circumstance for either party. Instead, the rich continue

their journey toward the privileged seats in comfortable positions high up in the stands of the

football stadium, and perhaps even claim the 'moral' victory by not being drawn into a staring

match; Johnson's firm continue to occupy the cheap seats, or even worse remain in the car

parks and pavements outside of the stadium in which the game is taking place.

The conciliation of the Lower-Class Male in Literature under Neo-liberalism

This section has displayed the effects of more recent capitalist discourses on the lower-class

male body. In the literature of the neo-liberalist era, a parallel line is drawn with that which was

articulated by Simon Heffer: the working-class man is either aspirational and thus flourishes

under the neo-liberal system whereby individuals could improve their material circumstances

by hard work and vigour, or, drops out of society and become part of an underclass. In this,

John Self, who exists ten years before either Renton or Johnson becomes for them what

Lampton was to Fisher and Seaton – their prophetic model. The characterisation and narrative

of Self displays that working-class protagonists are unable to play the neo-liberal capitalist

game and thus have no option but to 'drop out'. The socio-symbolic nature of the middle-class

gaze functions here to create an environment in which it is impossible for a subject who does

not possess the correct cultural capital to ascend the social ladder. As Driscoll has shown, this

model of Self expresses a society whose middle-class anxiety about working-class ascension

must be neutralized. In ideological terms, Self is made hopeless and his aspirations are the

subject of ridicule for the middle-class reader, in order to assuage those anxieties. In this

context, representations of the working-class male are shown to supplement discourse which –

as with Seaton and Fisher, seeks to keep the 'plebs' in their place, investing these individuals with a shape and significance moulded to the unequal social world we live in.

The fact that women's rights are now to an extent absorbed into mainstream thought and appropriated by the bourgeoisie means that the British New Wave school of working-class male resistance is not an option. Instead the sexual behaviour characterised by all dominant masculinity is projected onto the misogyny present in the hyper-masculine lower-class male, distracting from the patriarchy in operation in wider society. The message is clear: the middle-class position in a neo-liberalist society is not at risk from the working-classes, and any attempt from the latter to transcend its material circumstance is doomed to failure. Since the distinguishing line has been drawn between the unattainable ascension through hard work and those who can't achieve, the only sensible option is not to take part and thus reject the system. So it is in this context that underclass narratives begins to appear, in which masculinities, birthed in Self's demise, attempt to act out, as their New Wave forebears, identities in evermore salacious narratives. The terms in which these narratives reject the mainstream society are constructs of a specific group which lives out an imaginary victory against its oppressor. However, the rules by which Johnson or Renton measure a victory are one which the 'rich losers' do not feel the pain of defeat in any tangible way. Furthermore, the existing alienation is intensified by the group whose identity is found in its rebellion. This has a reifying effect for the mainstream, which is now re-afforded the belief that these groups are an actual existing and homogeneous underclass which takes drugs, victimizes women and commits act of violence. In turn, a separation between this 'underclass' and the rest of society is sustained. What is more, the performances of masculine class rebellion takes place at a safe distance - beneath a society who seldom comes into contact with them - from which the reader can be entertained by the shenanigans whilst the feeling of threat to its class is placated.

8. Conclusion

Part one of this thesis has traced the terms by which the working-class male has been produced and understood. Through a socio-symbolic language that privileges the activities of the mind over those of the body, the bourgeoisie has historically created a discourse which serves to legitimate its own economic strength. This has been displayed throughout the rise of a capitalist economy through which the middle-class has grown to become the pervading voice of Britain, developing a structure that first produces an economically disadvantaged group and then dictates the symbolic terms by which this group is read, and moreover is able to understand itself. This system has also been shown to create competitive and aggressive forms of masculinity to serve the needs of its capitalist enterprise, which, in turn, has fixed lower-class males in roles whereby they are prohibited from higher valued practices of employment and wider social activity. Consequently, these lower-class males have been forced to seek out ways in which they can negotiate the values placed upon them and establish for themselves a more positive identity. However, the ways in which they are able to execute this is subject to the same valuating practice of what has been termed the middle-class gaze, which then sees them demonized (or demonize themselves) further, re-enforcing the initial moralizing social distinctions drawn by the bourgeoisie in the first place.

Whereas the texts representing the male working-class protagonist which have been examined here may have traditionally been seen to have exposed or even perhaps subverted the domination the lower-classes have experienced at the hand of the privileged social group, the analysis of these texts has to an extent displayed the opposite. The latter chapters of Part One of this thesis have demonstrated that rather than create a form of political resistance, each text functions to further embed its protagonist within the discursive narrative of the epoch in which he was produced, and thus serve to reproduce the very politics it was thought to challenge. This latter point begs the question as to whether these forms of literature can provide a vehicle for the creation of a subversive or emancipatory class politics, or whether it can only ever exist

within its conventional context, in a manner which affirms the political agenda of the time in which it is created. As a means of understanding this question further, my own creative attempt to establish a politics, first within these forms, then in other literary arenas, will be investigated in Part Two below.

Part Two

Creative Practice: Working Out the Process and Final Project

Introduction

In late 2010, at the same time I was beginning the theoretical examination delineated in Part One, I decided to explore the writing of a novel which, as stated in the introduction to this thesis, I envisaged would run alongside the theory. This interest was originally generated by the creation of an extended fictional narrative, commenced as part of a Masters Degree, which sought to respond to current social attitudes surrounding white working-class masculinity. In continuing this process as part of my Ph. D, my objective was to establish a theoretical basis that would inform my creative work, and perhaps enable a problematization of the discourse I'd perceived to have emerged in recent years. In experimenting with my own representation of a young male protagonist, I intended to present an alternative representation of working-class masculinity which served to disrupt the conventional manner in which these working-class men were being portrayed as useless caricatures. But, as is clear from Part One, the attempt to represent in the body of a mainstream narrative the identity of a working-class male subject incurs discursive problems of its own, and many of those problems studied in this thesis became apparent in my own work. The theoretical accounts which served to inform my analysis of existing texts, also called into question the creative work through which I had attempted to express my own concerns. This, in turn, necessitated the reconsideration of the creative work which I had thus far produced, and furthermore, as observed at the conclusion of Part One, the reconsideration, informed by examinations of previous texts, of the narrative vehicle through this was currently being expressed.

This part, then, delineates the working out of this re-examination of my own original social perceptions, the ways their understanding has shifted and their relative creative expressions. Employing the socio-symbolic construction of classed identity, used in Part One, the analysis of my own fictional text will take place in similar terms as that of the previous texts. The

presentation of pertinent extracts of my fictional work,[23] will foreground particular issues with respect to my protagonist and his response to his social position. The analysis of this text will begin, as with that of Part One, with an outline of the socio-political climate in which it found its genesis. Drawing upon accounts of political commentators, a position on the narrative developed with regard to the lower-classes by Tony Blair's New Labour will be advanced. Following this, the protagonist of my novel-in-progress will be introduced and contexualized within this New Labour discourse, before his behaviour in respect to his position within the socio-political economy is weighed by the same two qualities of characterisation (outlined in Chapter Five) against which earlier protagonists have here been examined. The manner in which he utilizes specific features of his personhood to establish prominence against the rest of the novel's cast will be discussed within the scope of the period's wider discursive nature, and its contribution to the perception of the lower-classes at large will be examined. This is in order to question whether the politics of his representation achieves the objectives with which this project commenced.

Having located in my own work the same problematic concerns found in the previous narratives, an understanding will then be advanced, employing a critical humanist approach towards the limits of the conventions by which these working-class representations are produced. Drawing upon the work of Plummer, Stanley and other theorists, the following section will present alternative ideas for working out creatively my shifting perceptions of class representations, my place within these – both challenged through the course of Part One, and, furthermore, the manner in which these can be more appropriately expressed in the site of a protagonist. These differing approaches will be weighed against the narrative forms previously examined to assert the potential that more flexible approach may house, ultimately arguing that a multi-dimensional avenue found in poetry might, in my work, destabilize the previous assumptions of fixed class identity. A brief outline of the current working-class representations in contemporary British poetry will then be provided, developing a similar understanding of

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[23] The full text of my unedited novel-in-progress can be found at dexterbigtime.wordpress.com

responses of three male poets to those found in the protagonists investigated earlier. This will project the prospective place of my voice within this arena, before my resultant body of work, articulated in the fractured narrative of a collection of poems, will be presented.

Novel-in-Progress: *Big Time*

[*Big Time* is a picaresque narrative which traces the progress of Dexter Hammond in his search for identity, from his working-class heritage in Swindon to the new possibilities afforded by the metropolis of London. Along the way, he has dalliances with stereotypes and misfits of the lower-classes, Christianity, the high street fashion industry and the world of rock 'n' roll as a means of finding his place in the universe and the people with whom he'd most like to share it.]

[Extract 1]

[NOTE: Included in this extract in the Prologue and first two chapters of Big Time, intended to set out the characteristic terms and social background from which this work of fiction can progress.]

Prologue

Picture a thirteen year-old, shortless and embarrassed by his racing car Y-fronts. Picture him staring at the muddy innards of a changing room, venomous eyes nipping at him, and at this moment wholly blaming his father. Picture him thinking.

One of the other boys says to him, It's all your fault you prick, even my nan would have scored that. It was a tap-in.

He's always been uneasy around all the noise and these other unruly boys and also, what he believes is called, banter. The motivational shouts before a match scare three helpings of shit out of him. They're so rough with each other – back slaps, hair tousles – and he doesn't like it, and he's always known he's marginally above all that.

In any town you'd find an odd ball, a misunderstood idler – rejected by the many for his eccentricities. But someone who's sure he's destined for greater things. In Swine Hill, this boy is that odd ball and he knows it, and now he switches his gaze to that muddy yellow kit on the floor, as another boy snipes, You're only in this team 'cos your dad bought us that shitty yellow kit. He's glad his father isn't present to witness this.

His father.

Who only bought that shitty yellow kit and forced him to join this team because he imagined it'd knock the strangeness out of him. Who thinks this boy is too old for his peculiarities, for his dressing up. But who himself is the sole reason for their genesis. This boy recalls, aged six, that infamous World Cup quarter final: how his father leapt from his semi-recumbent position – upending his supper over the carpet, and aimed a dazzling number of expletives at the TV. That he

looked on in stark amazement as the recipient of his father's abuse ran the length of a field while the latter cursed the quarters of Scotch egg at his own feet.

This boy marvelled that the actions of somebody from the other side of the globe drew such a garish flush of emotion from his dad, and such joy from those captured by the live panning camera. And he drank deep of the slow-motion smile breaking on this somebody's face. The next day, as photos of this somebody were accompanied by headlines denouncing him as a charlatan and a cheat, this boy pulled a royal blue t-shirt from his father's closet and customised it – sketching on its back a difficult number ten with a black marker pen. He then bestrode his sorry dad with the chant, I'm The Hand, The Famous Hand Of God, because in his six year-old mind he thought it might cheer him.

But the reaction he got was better than he could have hoped: a hard stare. A glance exchanged between parents. His father led him down the garden path, into the garage and set him in the family car, then disappeared. In his head, he sees that man now as he saw him then: through the yawning garage door, skulking toward the driver's seat.

That evening they drove around Swine Hill, unspeaking for an hour. Just the two of them.

He takes off his own yellow football shirt and scans the room, looking in vain for Bone Dick. Bone Dick who was born – to his own amusement – with a bone in his dick and usually dances naked round the changing room, mambo-style. This sometimes distracts his teammates from their brutality.

There are other things this boy remembers.

Through the mentorship of TV shows – Top of the Pops and ITN News, he constructed a wardrobe of surprises for his father's return from the building site. His second best surprise, he thinks, was at age eight, when he powdered his face and begged his mother to pencil black the edges of his eyes. He recognised the engine outside, donned a dead granddad's bowler, his mother's black gown and greeted his father clad almost identically to Boy George.

The face of his elder crumbled.

His best surprise, he recognises, came much later. Having constructed a paper tiara, dipped a fist into the jewellery box in his parents' room, he descended in a pink frock, a silver brooch, and negotiated all maternal protests to place himself in a prominent chair, so when his father slumped through the back door, he was furnished with a rolling Royal wave of a son, dressed entirely as Her Majesty the Queen.

Fuck off, he interrupts himself to belatedly tell the second contemporary accuser, At least I'm not stupid. Bone Dick's got more brains than you in the bone in his dick. And as for you! He turns to the first boy, but fails to execute a punch line, because he recalls that the father-son drive on that night he dressed as the Queen lasted almost forever. Vividly, now from a changing room corner, he sees his father's firm gaze cast toward him in that passenger seat. He likes to think that he had a reason back then for switching on the radio. Likes to imagine that his dad knew something, was aware of a pattern on Wednesday evenings and had planned the whole scene, because he had something he wanted to say. A message was wedged like a splinter deep within his dad's skin and turning septic, but his dad couldn't get it out on his own.

He likes to think it wasn't coincidence that GWR f.m. cracked, then spat forth a slow, mellifluous melody and the message:

Son you'll be a bachelor boy, and that's the way to stay.

Son, you'll be a bachelor boy, until your dying day.

Some people don't ever get a moment like that from their dads, he thinks. But he got that gift. Just one.

He bets the two boys approaching him now hadn't. Then says, Yeah, well, you're all incredibly manly aren't you, and sees himself immediately how they see him – a geek, a chump – as they begin to lift him up from the bench.

There is so much he could think about, while they hang him from a clothing peg by his Y-fronts, but his mind skirts them all and falls dead on that one unsuspecting Saturday, when his name was called and he went to the kitchen and gazed at the floor tiles. Then looked up to see his

father's arm about his mother's waist – a rare occurrence; the both of them grinning, he remembers, like terrorists.

When his team mates bind his ankles and wrists together with dirty socks, he remembers feeling he was about to lose a great deal in that kitchen when he asked, Are you getting a divorce? And somehow knew this feeling was right, when his father's grey eyes shone, when his father said, Bloody better than that, my lad. I've won the pools. But he was certain as well that this was an integral part in his journey toward greatness.

This boy couldn't help thinking his current circumstance had less to do with a lack of goal-mouth prowess and more to do with that ill twist of fate, as they shoved a sock in his mouth, then on their exit, answered the caretaker's, Is everybody out? with a Yes.

Picture him, when the lights go down and the door is locked, suspended by the band of his pants, and thinking, books will be written about my life and all this will make sense.

Part one, Chapter 1

'Dexter,' my mother called, 'dinner's on the table.'

I sauntered into the living room, took my place on the brown and orange swirled carpet and faced the TV. What she'd meant in fact was that dinner was ready, we actually ate Sunday roast watching the *Eastenders* omnibus.

My father hadn't moved from his place at the window.

He'd gotten smaller somehow and looked impish – perched on the white gloss windowsill, swearing to himself. A far cry from the hunter-gatherer whose return from the worksite caused my senses to dilate. When he won the pools, he wilted.

Things're gonna change a bit round 'ere, he'd said, and went on to retain the same house; all of the same furniture; he bought a new car, though it was the same Vauxhall Cavalier model as our

existing vehicle, only gaudy-bronze. The singular difference in our lives was that he ceased employment. He retired and had nought to fill his time.

Over those initial idle months, what had always been a mild irritation at the Methodist church opposite crystallized slowly into a dark hatred. The first signs of this were his frequent and indignant gasps when smiling faces appeared at the church's cusp mid-afternoon, Sunday. Then came his irritability for the two or so hours they were inside the building, his inability to settle – this grew into a feature for all three church services that occurred.

He began to take this position of annoyance at the windowsill when, one Sunday lunch time, we could hear the congregation singing just below the volume of *Eastenders*.

That was four and a half years ago.

Most of the neighbours had a gripe about the Faithful of this chapel – it was named after our road, and no local resident had, to my knowledge, ever been inside. But my father re-negotiated his role in life to be the street's impotent stronghold against, amongst other things, their theft of our parking spaces – like an apathetic troll that only complains. Dad, as you know, had a garage.

'Reg, come on it'll get cold,' my mother chided.

He levered himself to the floor and made his way to the black leather armchair, where his plate waited.

Without having to glance round I knew he'd cut first a piece of Yorkshire Pudding, because he always cut first a piece of Yorkshire Pudding.

I heard it smack the insides of his mouth and mimed the words I knew came next, 'Those bloody people. Coming out of that bloody place. Singing loud. Shouting "Praise God this, Praise God that".' Smack. Smack. 'All clapping their hands with no thought for us down this street,' he gave off a manly sniff. 'Then they swan over to their cars parked in our bloody spaces and –'

I turned up the TV. Pat Butcher had that look in her eye which betrayed that beneath her hard-woman exterior, a fragile little girl was desperate to be ensconced in the arms of a father. Once again I thought she might confront fully this inner-child.

'Don't bother yourself with it, Love,' my mother said to him.

'Bugger don't bother yourself with it,' dad said.

Pat lit a cigarette, defiant.

Disappointed she'd chosen to employ another barrier instead of facing her real pain, I turned to watch my mother. She said, 'Well, every week you say the same thing and it never changes, so –'

Exactly my point, should I have decided to make one. You start out in life idealising your father, mimicking the way he eats his sausages and chips, appropriating images of TV dads teaching TV sons how to shave, then one day you're sixteen and look up from the TV and he's become a withered, old disappointment, doing nothing to change that one thing about which he's forever moaning.

I cut first my Yorkshire Pudding.

'I'll bloody make it change,' he said, and grabbing his coat, stomped off and out the front door.

I took his place, still warm, at the window's edge, rapt with the potential of seeing him stick one on some bloke's nose again – hoping it would be akin to the scuffle that put a full-stop to my sentence at that football club. A full-stop imprinted a week after my Y-fronts episode, and caused by my exploitation of my mother's job as kit-washer. I seized one shirt at random from the bag of freshly cleansed uniforms, and drew a large penis with a marker pen (in the place one would find a number on the shirts of professionals). Where the pro's name would be, I had written the wearer's full title, *Ima Bender*.

I had watched content as one of my previous aggressors threw on the aptly embellished shirt, without so much as a twitch, and placed his warm-up tracksuit over it. The game moved at such a pace that day that the crowd of parents on the touchline didn't fully grasp the message on the back of my victim. Instead, it took the laughter of a number of the opposing team for realisation to crack.

Hoopla ensued as the father, perturbed by everyone pissing themselves at his son's expense, launched himself at our manager, before being pointed by his son in my direction, who said, It was probably 'im.

The defensive dad began favouring me with obscenities, stopping only when the fist of my own father filled his mouth.

The game was abandoned.

That day housed the last show of life I'd seen in my father. It also held our last car journey – one that was different from the others. After admitting my guilt, my father laughed all the way home, winding the window down at one point to shout, My son's a bloody genius.

I thanked him, but expressed my surprise at not being in trouble. Are you bloody joking, he had said, that bloke's one of them tossers that goes to the church over the road. I've been wanting to clout him for ages.

I watched now with growing anticipation for his resurgence of manhood, as my father strode with purpose towards an important looking chap on the cusp of church's ground, before deviating to the right and vanishing through the porch of one of the neighbouring families.

Chapter 2

There once lived a woman called Ms Battles, and she was big and rouged and everything to me for one year and five months. After my father won the pools I was sent to her for my education, not because my father was concerned about education, but because my behaviour at school was deemed a problem by its teachers. Strolling the school grounds at break times with A4 sheets of paper torn and rolled like bank notes into my trouser pocket (and with copper pennies to jingle), I'd begun to address other pupils as 'serfs'. I wasted no syllables in transposing the fact that my father, and thus I, was a rich man. That we had a chauffer called Ian Botham, who mostly was

employed to ferry me around, as my dad was busy with his plethora of sports cars. And once, I mooned a teacher.

Ms Battles had a theatrical background and her home was hugely different from mine. Dark varnished floorboards, instead of an orange and brown carpet. Most shocking was the TV set, banished to the corner like a naughty child deprived of attention (at least while I was doing work).

She was as working-class as a dinner lady, but kind of knew her stuff. There were pictures of her everywhere with casts of West End productions. Framed posters from shows with her name in small letters on the walls. Didn't you get scared, I once asked her. And she told me her secret: before a show, she'd take the initial of whichever word was the source of her nerves, and try to name as many other words as she could beginning with that letter. She would do this until she got on stage. When you arrive on stage, you don't have time to worry, or think, she said.

Education. At eleven years old I was given access to her massive old trunk of clothing and miscellany. The deal was this: I could play in it after I'd finished the work she'd set. After Maths I'd pull out a purple scarf. After English I'd yank out a string of old hankies or a cigar box.

I loved it there.

Loved it when we performed old music hall acts together. Loved singing along when she played me old show tunes. But best by far was that encouraging laugh after I finished basically anything. It made me think I was better than the average youngster. Though, please don't think this was arrogance, because in reality: I was better.

And I was part of her home. There was the musky smell of old stuff, the strange shaped lamp which angled light in odd directions, and me.

One day I found a tiny book of illustrated poems and extracted from the chest a whole outfit I thought a poet should wear. That day I recited 'The Lady of Shalott' for her amusement: it was long, easily rhymed, it gave me her eyes for ages. When I finished, she pressed me close to her big spongy bosom and we laughed. And laughed.

Then we drank orange juice. I went home in that outfit: a battered boater, a red and black neckerchief, a cape on whose hem I trod with each step. I spoke aloud a short piece of that verse which I'd memorised.

My dad stared. And exchanged looks with my mother. But he didn't take me out in his new car. Instead he took me out of her tutelage.

He had power, my dad. He had capital. The tragedy was he never capitalised on his power.

At Headlands Secondary School, I endeavoured to make up for his shortcomings. They called me 'Richie Rich', because I frequently carried a large top hat (with a crimson ribbon round its middle) under my arm between lessons.

I was also often pushed in corridors. And worse.

The Swine is a small pond and when I was forced into college, the concern on my first walk there was I'd be found out by one or two of my old school mates. That they'd be randomly sat in my new tutor room and I'd enter humiliated. They would see instantly that any number of lies I told about my post-GCSE life wasn't true.

I wasn't being sent to pilot school.

That day I furnished my head with that same top hat. To ease my nerves approaching the college grounds, I thought: College.

Charisma.   Cordonbleu.   Calculated.
Contemptible.Cantankerouscactuscrunchescrocuscrouchingcalmly(onthe)couch.

Crap. I helped myself to a map at the reception desk and headed for the Leisure and Tourism room, my knees shaking inside my cotton trousers as I stepped up to the already open door.

Crucifixion.

'Come in, come in,' said a greying ginger women, whose hair was piled high atop her head. I did so, scanning the class – only managing to take in flashes of baseball caps. There were

sniggers, and an Oh-my-God was whispered just audible enough for it to echo off the walls of the semi-empty room.

'And you are?'

'Dexter.' I said, gulping. 'Dexter Hammond.' There were eight others present, excluding what must have been the tutor.

'Well, have a seat, Dexter. We were just telling each other a bit about ourselves and why we've chosen a Leisure and Tourism GNVQ.'

I took a spot at a grey oblong table, next to a girl whose open mouth displayed a lack of dental care. I placed my top hat on the desk and ruffled my hair. The tutor smiled tight-lipped and nodded at the goofy girl next to me.

'What, me?' the girl said. Then, 'Well, umm my name's Kelly-Ann, I joined the course because I think it'll be fun.'

'How so, Kelly – do we call you Kelly or Kelly-Ann?'

'Kelly-Ann.'

'Why would it be fun, Kelly-Ann?'

I wondered the same thing. Having signed up on the understanding that its proximity to my house wailed: Convenience; its content: Ease.

'Because,' Kelly-Ann went on, emitting an embarrassed half-giggle, 'I've always been into sport-and-that and thought… umm, Miss, do we do sports here?'

The other bodies in the class were silent.

'Elements of the course include recreation, Kelly-Ann, yes.'

Kelly-Ann nodded sagely.

I bounced my knee, too nervous yet to speak. Though thankfully the tutor moved off in the other direction. She favoured a lad in a blue baseball cap with the same smile she had Kelly-Ann, 'What's your name?'

I'd composed myself enough now that I was able to perform a proper room check. I looked left, Kelly-Ann. I looked right, no one with whom I was acquainted. With relief I looked behind, an acned boy in a black baseball cap; a bloke with bum-fluff sideburns in a baseball cap.

This might be alright for me, I thought. As I listened to a half-grunted answer from a chap in a cap, I saw my role within the class take shape. What had always been a fund of discomfort might actually be played as a novelty here: my dress (which had already got a laugh), my eccentricities, if used correctly, could be a source of amusement for my classmates. I pictured myself in a tail coat. I could be a star of sorts amongst these sports lovers: Oscar Wilde or something. Courting the Leisure and Tourism world with wit.

Captivate. Carousal. Cornucopia.

A spark of excitement kindled at the prospect. I would have to acquire some consistent attire, brush up on literary quotations. For now, I thought about what my greatest mentor, Ms Battles, might suggest that I do in answer to the ensuing question. What I could commit to the group as their introduction to who I was. Perhaps I could burst into song. Flip my hat up to my head, plonk a foot atop the desk, spread wide my arms and sing:

Son you'll be a bachelor boy and that's the way to stay

Son you'll be a bachelor boy until your dying day.

I tapped the side of my hat, breathed deep and stepped through the refectory's double doors. I walked to the refrigerator and pulled out a Cherry Coke. Two of my tutor group's male contingent were at a table to the far right of the serving counter. I took another breath and left my can half way along the counter, excused myself back down the queue to the fridge, where I pulled out another two Cherry Cokes. Then edged my way along the queue again and caught a disgusted expression from a dinner lady, whose pupils flicked from my hat to me.

It hadn't gone well during that session.

I'd had so many ideas for an answer – each one causing an inward chuckle – that when the tutor posed me the question, I froze, stammered, and experienced something close to stage fright. Finally, when I opened my mouth, I didn't sing, I uttered something lame: I want to try out being a lifeguard.

I don't know why. Then a cloud of irony had descended on the room, I felt its purple presence, each person picturing the absurdity of a lifeguard in a top hat.

There *was* a successful joker in the pack though. His name was Gavin, an acned and stocky, tight t-shirt wearing skinhead. His answer, Because it's free, got a giggle. A reaction that at once declared him group leader, hands down. I watched him lean back in his chair as I should have been doing, hands knitted behind his head. Satisfied with his day's work.

This was the pose he struck now I caught his eye. He briefly stuck one fist in the air and shouted, Alright Top Hat, then replaced that hand behind his head. His four syllables still echoing around the canteen. His benediction.

I estimated about twenty-six steps from where I was to where they were, it was the closest I'd ever been to an in-crowd. I thought, If I can just get to them and sit down, then I will be one of them and I'll buy a baseball cap. I weaved through some odd glances, tentative, and counting each step to distract me from how slippery the drinks in my hand were, how elusive the floor. There were actually thirty-one steps. Tonight, I said to myself when I reached them, I will buy a blue baseball cap, with a massive NY logo on it.

Gavin met me with a slow nod – his biceps twitching behind his head – and continued to grin at whatever the other was saying. I had arrived half expecting them to both turn to me, as if to say, What d'you think you're doing? But they didn't turn at all. I placed my Cherry Coke offerings on the table, noticeable but unimposing, and lowered myself into a vacant chair. Then smiled to connect with their humorous conversation …

In The Swine there are three colleges. New College – a relatively 'new college' where most business-minded secondary schoolers end up. And two Swindon Colleges – the first of which I

should probably have been attending, here the student commits to an A-level in English Literature, or an A-level in Mathematics, or in German, but as soon as he signs up his life is mapped: he will proceed to a university course in English, or Maths, or German, then graduate to teach it, or use it for the benefit of a large company. I went to the second Swindon College. The college for rejects, which offers only GNVQs, and whose intake, everyone knows, is made up of dossers and drop-outs; the Hair and Beauty students won't become barbers, the Cookery students won't go on to work with Gordon Ramsay. And if I had to learn something, I'd learn how not to work in the leisure and tourism industry. With these boys on my table.

'... So,' said Sideburns, 'he only went and swapped the video when the teacher went out the room, to a pirate copy of that OTHER Animal Farm.' Gavin was on the brink of pleasure. I joined him there. 'Ha.' I added. Sideburns cracked open his Cherry Coke (without acknowledging my generosity) and took a sip:

'When she came back in,' he went on, 'we weren't watching an animated film of the book we'd bin reading, we were all watching a woman wanking off an 'orse.'

Gavin enjoyed this, bellowed a long display of appreciation. I made an additional head bob – showing my own desperate amusement.

I took in the sight of the two lads. Then traced a line with my eyes from each of them to myself. I was about to trace us into a triangle – me to Sideburns to Gavin and back to me, but Gavin said Oi, and nudged my elbow. He then nodded in the direction of the counter, where two of the tutor group's girls were stood. One of whom had her back to us, displaying an arse with the seam of her tracksuit tucked neatly into its crease, describing an almost vertical smile.

'Kin' hell,' Gavin began to laugh again, tilting his plastic chair onto its two hind legs, and arching his back. We all knew what this comment meant. It was a remark upon the arse-crack – yes, but also a wider analysis of what the females in the group had to offer.

All this was a novelty for me to be a part of. But in the wake of his observation, a mood of quiet reflection took over the table, a mourning for the absence of attractive girls. Beneath it, a

sense of unease twitched inside me, What if no one says anything else all day, I thought, and we have to sit looking at each other? Someone would surely see behind my mask. Or worse, what if the subject matter is changed to a topic of which I have no knowledge? My ears grew hot, what if they ask me about football?

Gavin returned his seat to the safer four-legged position, and rubbed his eyes. 'Which one of them two munters would you bang? If you had to?'

The chap to my left, Sideburns, pulled the sort of face that showed the thought alone made him sick. I took this as a guide for the tone of my answer, and waited for a signal to give it. None came, so I sucked a load of breath in through my teeth and said, 'It's a toughy.'

Gavin twisted to me in a sudden intense stare, as if examining, as if scrutinising my physiognomy. This is it, I thought. Each second he was a second closer finding me out. I quickly said, 'Sex.'

This didn't seem to do the trick. He blinked, and a shimmer of confusion rippled across his face, 'What's that, Top Hat?'

'I mean,' I scrambled to save myself, 'how many other blokes have they had sex with, do you think?'

He grinned, exhibiting a full set of crooked teeth, 'Why?'

I hadn't thought this far. The pressure was building in the back of my lungs because I didn't know why. Then I got it, but Sideburns leaned in before I could speak, 'He's got a point, they're all booted, but one might be more experienced,' he said.

'I was thinking more in terms of validation.' I ventured, 'Like, when my parents found out most people shopped at Tesco, they began shopping at Tesco.'

There was a beat of complete muteness, then Gavin's smile widened, he nodded his head with a faint, but deep series of titters. 'Yeah, but slags like that are loose,' he said. And I didn't understand what it meant. 'That Kelly-Ann looks like she's been around. I reckon it'd be like

throwing a sausage down a street with her.' Again, I was stumped. Then he said: 'You'd probably have to bum her for it to be any good.'

I burst into abrupt laughter, until I noticed Gavin wasn't laughing, because it wasn't a joke.

[Extract Two]

[NOTE: Having noted his father's, and his neighbouring community's outrage at the Methodist church on their road, Dexter has attempted to gain attention by attended one of their services, finding inspiration in its guest speaker, a somewhat charismatic man to whom he is reintroduced at the end of this chapter.

Having ingratiated himself with the dominant males in his tutor group, through joining in with their consumption of drugs, Dexter looks to consolidate this new found status by accepting an invitation to attend a club night with these boys.]

Chapter Six

'Fifty Pee Friday' at Kaos night club. A monthly treat for students of The Swine, and presumably the filthy old men who fancied they might be able to have sexual relations with a drunk teenager. As well as an unbeatable entrance fee, the club also boasted a girls-get-two-drinks-for-the-price-of-one policy.

I was scheduled to meet Gavin and Sideburns at nine, at the top of the dual carriageway past the college, so we could make the trip together and share a bottle of cider.

This is now the person I am, I thought as I made my way to the rendezvous point. I drink bottles of cider with skinheads and other boys with massive sideburns and we all attend cheap night club events together. It was actually incredible how I'd managed to carve a role in Gavin's clique, and thus the wider tutor group. Not its definitive leader, but as a minor wit. A crony. Whose role I discovered was to obey these things:

A) Wait for Gavin to poke fun at someone or something, then make a half-funny side comment.

B) Give generously.

On the way I stopped in at a store which Gavin called 'The Ghandi'. It was run by a greying Asian man, and sometimes his son, who I'd spotted around college. I reckoned – given that we, Gavin's gang, were *all* smokers – I should get us some cigarettes.

Thanks to the above guidelines, I was enjoying a status unforeseeable during my school career, but one which could still be undone if I didn't play with caution. Choosing an outfit for the evening, for example, hadn't been easy. I saw only a dichotomic gap in my wardrobe, with The Flamboyant (inclusive of my preaching uniform) on its left and The College Clobber (inclusive of stuff purchased in JD Sports) on its right. I had no acceptable Smart Wear. As I picked through my clothes an idea hit me, I might have become some kind of religious superhero. The NY cap was to me what spectacles were to Clarke Kent. Or perhaps the preaching hat, my fedora, was the disguise. I pulled on a plain shirt, and some trousers – whose tight fit felt wrong in this context. Wrapping a belt round their waist, I left the top button of the flies undone, and wriggled them down for a bit more slack. Then untucked my shirt. My hair remained un-gelled, un-hatted.

Now I had the worry of which brand of cigarettes to buy. Eventually, I asked the old man for the Embassys my dad smoked. And a purple lighter. Then ambling toward the meeting point, I gave myself time to practice inhaling without coughing up an embarrassing lungful. It was vulgar, but nearing the end of the first fag I resolved to just do what I did with Gavin's drugs, hold the smoke in my mouth. This doesn't burn the lung sacks at all, and it's the look that matters anyway.

I rehearsed the casual blowing of smoke, giving the impression of connoisseurship.

When I got to the corner, Gavin was swigging from a light-green two litre bottle. He wiped his mouth on his arm and said, 'Easy, Top Hat,' as Sideburns materialised from behind a wall, fiddling with his flies.

I offered them a pair of 'Alright!'s, and then I didn't know what else to do because this was the first time I'd hung out with anyone outside of planned educational or social activity. So I waited.

Gavin passed me the bottle and clapped his hands, 'So, we all ready to go get pissed and smash some pussy?' His acne was ruby coloured in places.

Our journey took us behind a leisure centre, through three tunnels under the main roads of The Swine and alongside some large, redbrick industrial buildings. It was like a canal passage but

instead of water, pavement. As we were halfway along our route, enjoying life, taking it in turns to swing that big green bottle to our lips, I suddenly realised: we were entirely alone. When one of us swallowed it was the only thing you could hear. If this friendship was all a trick, they could kill me here and no one would know.

The silence hummed, so I reached into my back pocket, and said, 'Would anyone like a delicious Embassy cigarette?' Then I added, 'They're my favourites,' but this part didn't sound convincing.

Lighting Gavin's Embassy made me more uneasy. I ran my thumb over the lighter, but it didn't work. I thought, If I fail like that again, he'll know everything about me. I tried a second time. No flame.

Had I not bought the cigarettes, what took place next wouldn't have happened. Had I been better at lighting cigarettes, it wouldn't have happened. But because Gavin had stopped for me to light a cigarette I'd bought, and because I couldn't light it properly, he was forced to take the lighter, and to turn his back to the wind. That's when he saw it.

It lay on the grassy side of the paved thoroughfare, blinking: a pigeon, unable to flap one of its wings.

When Gavin stopped lighting his cigarette I knew right then it was going to die.

When Gavin crouched down beside it, I felt the world sway a bit.

He poked it in the beak with my lighter. There was an instant in which the bird didn't move, almost as if it expected that Gavin was making primary First Aid inquiries. Almost as if it thought it was safe. Then it realised, stopped blinking and began to flail in panic; Gavin let out a small chuckle and, holding cigarette, lighter and bottle in one hand, used the other to wrench it from the floor.

I didn't dare speak as he pressed it into my chest.

Now Gavin lit his cigarette - took a glug of cider and called to Sideburns, 'Oi, wanna see how Matt le Tissier does it,' then he spun to me, thrust out his magnificent chin, and said, 'C'mon. Up high, son.'

'What?' I said.

He said, 'Throw it up high, like a footballer's just put a cross in. He took a breath to steady himself, 'Ready man? After three. One. Two – '

I glanced at Sideburns, who was nodding his head in small, quick movements, taking rapid drags of his own cigarette, and felt the weight of the bird shifting in my angled grip.

' – Three.' I threw it quick, without thinking, exhaling horribly as it left my palms and as Gavin leaped, rising two feet high in the air, and met the bird with a powerful volley. When its head baulked at the connection and there was a dull slap, and everything inside me ran away screaming. I had to hold my breath to make myself not cry.

It hit the ground just in front of me and I didn't look, just lit a cigarette, like Pat Butcher when she's hiding her emotions. And coughed. Sideburns yelled an excited swear word, while Gavin, like a medieval warrior, lifted the bottle to his face, drank deep and wiped his lips with the back of his beefy wrist.

By the time we got to Kaos, it felt like I had been on a merry-go-round whose speed had grown faster and faster, and now I'd been flung off and was tumbling. My head was candyfloss and fizzy drink, not because I'd had a third of a two litre bottle of cider – more than I'd ever drunk – but because I'd brutally murdered a pigeon.

The world had changed.

The Swine was a different place that Friday night.

Even though it was barely ten o'clock, the club was bursting with thugs, who'd doubtless close their evenings by breaking a nose or a window, or by kicking a helpless creature to death. I became more aware of my place wthin them. More aware of my mum, and why I usually settled with the gift of my bedroom TV.

When Sideburns went to the bar, myself and Gavin found a table. We sat down, then I stood up and excused myself immediately, marched to the gent's, removed all the Embassys from the packet individually and flushed them down the toilet bowl.

I had it in mind to do this since we'd been queuing to get in, and had no plans afterwards.

As I screwed up the last one someone banged hard on the door, and an irate voice yelled, 'Fuckin' 'ell, mate, the fuck you doin' in there.' Then a fist slammed against the door again and said, 'Fuck!'

After the third bout of door punches, I realised the man on the other side wasn't scared even though it could have been anyone in here. I could have been Gavin, and the bloke hadn't a second thought about smacking on this door. I paused, thinking the universe was about to exact its stupid revenge.

Fear adopted an avuncular role. It put its arm over my shoulder, ruffled my hair. When I unbolted the cubicle door, the bloke waiting was the same size as me, but sweating, and in an almost entirely unbuttoned checked shirt. He was angry but I could see the vestiges of childhood freckles on his chest, which made him some way less frightening.

Sideburns still wasn't back from buying drinks, so I sat back down and watched Gavin closely. I studied the way he was breathing, the direction his pupils moved. When they edged toward me, I looked at my feet. I sensed how I'd probably experienced a personality forming event tonight, thought about what could have been different if we hadn't killed that pigeon. The future me might have turned out a completely better man to the one I was now destined to be. I tried to remember what the Chaos Theory meant and didn't enjoy the co-incidence as I should have, of being in a club called Kaos.

Gavin kicked me lightly on the shin, 'Oi, Dexter, which slag in here would you smash, if you had to?'

I skirted over the morbidly obese (or otherwise skeletal) women, aggressive with studs in their faces. It was clear, in a room melding the aforementioned thugs with these girls, that one

promiscuous Friday night in Down Town Swine Hill could spell atrocity in a single generation's time.

I pointed at a girl, any one, and said, 'Her.'

I sunk the first drink Sideburns slammed on the table. It was purple.

He said, 'That was mine, you cunt,' and tilted a glass of normal coloured beer, suggesting this was the pint intended for me.

I apologised, asked him what it was called, then walked to the bar to get him another. I drew a five pound note from my pocket in preparation. But then moved past the bar, between the two bouncers in black suits in the doorway, around a couple kissing with tongues, down the stairs, beyond the people filing to check-in their coats, and out into the street.

But for the chill air, outside still felt like inside. The Down Town High Street was disgusting to me. Café-bars flanking the pavement with loud dance music – despite all of their customers having left for clubs; men in clinging shirts and chains costing a week's wages everywhere, swearing.

A big girl in a pink crop top was having her hair held back by her friend as she vomited – her rolls of tummy fat squished together. I watched the stuff pour out of her – it's singing orange colour - and imagined I was her, someone stroking my hair, soothing me in my repugnance.

I sat down in a doorway scudded thick and black with the dirt of the street, and took in the irony of the disco ball inside the bar, spinning its multi-coloured light out of the window, beneath which the girl now knelt, weeping. From inside the bar a man emerged, a lone figure I presumed to be a landlord about to kindly ask this girl and her companion to move on. But when the street light caught him I saw it was the Methodist Church preacher, the man by whom I'd been so inspired.

He was wearing jeans, and I stared in disbelief as he stepped around the sick girl and her friend, stopping only briefly to give off a short amused scoff, then marched on with a plastic pint cup in one hand, Sainsbury's carrier bag in the other. I scrambled to my feet.

To my mind there was a looseness to his gait, as I hung back three paces behind him. I followed him along a row of closed shops. Watched while he bumped sternums with a man all in leather and held up both palms in apology, then cut down a side street.

I pursued.

The car park was empty of life and its street lamps lent a crepuscular, funereal air. The preacher weaved through rows of vehicles, pausing at one stage to run an appreciative hand across the bonnet of a vintage sports car. I heard him whistle as he did so, and began to wonder in what sort of world a religious legend such as him could be in a car park, dizzying himself with material possessions.

Entering a narrow and slime-walled alley, I had subtly gained enough ground to observe him scratch his arse, and pull a half-smoked roll-up from behind his ear. As he lit it, he farted, muttering something just inaudible. There was a moment here, of familiarity. Something pulsated behind my eyes: if I wanted, I could speak now and make him jolt or I could scuttle up and punch him in the back of the head. He was a vulnerable human. When he moved off again, I did also, round a corner and onto another well-lit street.

I was still masticating on the potential of my first words when he swiveled like a soldier and placed one hand on the door of the frequently-egged Christian bookshop.

He flicked away his dog-end and embarked upon some sort of technique for ridding himself of its traces, looking faintly ridiculous by flapping a loose hand in front of his mouth, exhaling hard onto his palm, sniffing.

He put key to latch and tussled with the glass door; at the final push before it gave, he switched a naked glance in my direction. There was no recognition of me in his dark pupils.

[Extract Three]

[Note: Having felt consistently out of place with his college peers, Dexter drifted, for a period of time, into a Christian youth community led by Bob Cornerstone, the Methodist church's guest speaker from Chapter Six. During his time there, he experienced his first real friendship with 'The She Rat', and a supportive atmosphere generally. Having joined in a minor role in their 'schools outreach team', he imagines he has forfeited the supportive community when some mistakes in his schools work blow up in his face.

At the death of his father, he absconds to London with The She Rat, to live with a childhood friend of the latter in Peckham. He takes a job at Levi's in Covent Garden. This Extract details his meeting and the genesis of his relationship with Becky, who will become his girlfriend.]

Part Four Chapter 2

Levi's horrendous uniformity led me to draft in my head a letter of resignation, I chewed it over as I queued for a peek at the blonde sandwich girl at the shop on the corner at lunch time. When I returned the 'new staff', Becky, who'd been in the employ of the denim-peddlers for two days, was reclining on a pile of 501s in the tiny stockroom. Its singular light bulb cast a phosphorous vignette and bestowed a glow over her full voluptuosity.

She wasn't due a break for at least three hours, on account of her shift only beginning fifteen minutes ago. Yet, she was out here, nibbling her way up long strips of black liquorice. Instantly, I thought, She's better than me. I watched her from the corner of my eye, and my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth. My heart beat quite far back in my chest. Then she caught me peering and side-smirked.

What do you do when someone cool enough to eat liquorice strips instead of working like they're paid to do catches you staring at them? I smirked back, politely, and waited.

And again she smirked. It felt like flirting, but it almost certainly wasn't.

Now she wasn't looking anymore, but every time I bit into my sandwich I was incredibly conscious of having bitten into my sandwich. And incredibly conscious there might be

a rogue crumb on my chin, and also of the rush of silence between us. But what do you say to someone cool enough to eat liquorice strips instead of working, when the air between you and that person is thick with a quickening silence? I told myself, She looks like the type of person that might say the words 'shit hole'. I said, 'What a shit hole, eh?'

She turned to me, 'What?' and I froze at the sudden realisation that I had now this cool girl's attention. If I repeated these words then a private discussion would ensue.

I grabbed my composure and repeated the statement with a few amendments, 'What are you working here for, in this shit hole?' I emphasised the word 'here' so that it didn't sound aggressive, but matey.

She examined long and hard a strip of liquorice, and told me, 'It's a sideline.'

I paused expecting her to continue with her part of our private dialogue; she didn't. It knocked my confidence. I wondered if perhaps she might not want to talk to me. But I couldn't stop myself pushing out the words, 'Oh, right. What's your main thing then?'

This was the first time I saw her warm smile, a smile so nice that I hadn't quite understood the words it produced: 'I'm a plus-sized gymnast.'

'Sorry,' I said. 'What was it you just said?'

'A plus-sized gymnast?' She knit her eyebrows together in earnest. Then, heaving herself to her feet, she picked up a pair of waist size 34 501s, and matched the width to her own waist, saying, 'Gymnastics for the larger lady?!'

Oh. I felt stupid, and sizeist, as she went on to describe her gruelling regime of training, and to demonstrate some of her daily exercises to the rhythm of an Usher song in the background. She also outlined the vast amounts of carbohydrates she had to consume to make sure the exercise didn't trim her from the plus-sized category. 'Hence the liquorice strips.' She lifted up her bag of liquorice strips.

After that I spent most of the afternoon trying to make her like me.

I didn't feel I had given a good account of myself in the stockroom. Was uncertain whether she was enjoying our snatches of conversation, or tolerating them, but I determined to win her over. We had managed, between folding jeans, to exchange some details about our lives. I told her I'd just moved to London, and she told me that she'd just moved to London and (in addition to her gymnastics), had a step-brother who lived in east London and she enjoyed reading and music. I lied and told her that, Yes, I enjoy those things too. When the shop closed we walked to Charing Cross Station together.

This was a good sign, that we continued many strands of topics previously discussed. I grew assured now she seemed to talk more freely, but the depth with which she spoke about the literature I claimed to love also beat me into recognising that I had no clue at all. In fact, even though I loved reading with Ms Battles, I hadn't read a proper book on my own, ever.

'What you into right now? She asked.

I remembered Oscar Wilde. So said, 'Oscar Wilde,' Then before she could asked more, I threw the question back at her.

'I just finished this,' She pulled from her bag The Lonely Londoners by Sam Selvon, 'it shows you the alienation the first wave of immigrants experienced, but also the loneliness, I reckon, everyone feels sometimes in London, especially when you're new.'

She handed it to me in a gesture that I knew meant I could borrow it, so I took it in my hands and thanked her. Then for absolutely no reason I just told her the truth, Actually I don't know anything about literature. But, I added, I'm keen to learn, and suggested perhaps she could recommend a few more books.

There was a pause in which I predicted she'd call me a liar. But afterwards she smiled and said, 'You got to be anywhere for a certain time?'

[…]

Chapter 3

[…]

[NOTE: Dexter here aims to extend his relationship with Becks, but is also responding to the jealousy of a new friendship which his housemates have formed, with a man named Derek (D-Rock). In the previous scene, the house mates and Derek had been bantering about a 'broken penis' the latter had shown them on the internet.]

Becky swanned into my 'zone'. We were now proper friends now. I was elevated to a place from which I could call her 'Becks'. We were united by the hatred of our jobs (except secretly I sometimes looked forward to mine because she'd be there), and by a love for Selvon's book. We'd been out for a beer three times after work – something I'd never done.

It was like being adult.

I was hoping soon that she could introduce me to more books, or to the music she liked, and then we could have that in common also.

She said, 'I'm trying to work out who's the biggest dickhead: A.N. Other Customer, Levi Strauss, or his little lap-dog over there.' She nodded towards the shop supervisor, Justine.

I thought about that morning, reckoning that if my housemates had a secret friend, so could I. I considered my options: there was only one. I would talk like they all spoke to each other. 'I've got a story that might cheer you up.' I said.

She eyed me with nonchalance.

'I saw a picture on the internet of a broken dick last night.'

I thought perhaps I might start calling her B-Rock. Or The She Rock.

She eyed me with suspicion.

'My friends showed me,' I panicked and thought this sounded better than saying, My house mates have a friend who showed them a picture of a broken penis, and I looked it up afterwards on my own because I wanted to feel included.

She suggested that I meant it was lying by itself on the floor somewhere, and I told her, No, it was attached to a man. Then she made a disgusted face, and asked how my flat mates knew where to find broken cocks on the internet, and why, and after that asked what it was like.

'It was kind of …broken.' I told her. 'And bloated.'

'Did it say he did it trying to bum another man?' She curled her forefinger tight into her thumb and thrust the other hand's forefinger at it, making it bend on impact. This was the great thing about Becks, she made the kind of jokes boys would make. Penis jokes and jokes about gay people.

I told her that on the website it said his slender girlfriend did it. And had an inkling B-Rock might like it if I added 'The animal' on the end. So I did: 'The animal.' I said, and she smiled. Sometimes it was like we had always been friends, or like she was my slightly older sister.

When Justine called my name from the other side of the store, she was wearing her eyebrows way up her forehead, in reprimand.

Justine was good at being a supervisor. But the injustice was that Becks had come over to talk to *me*; I was perfectly in my 'sales zone'. A pang of protest in my chest. As the former asked me to show a 'gentleman' a pair of 505s, a feeling close to shame fondled my gut, a small part of me wanted to point at Becks, shouting, It wasn't me, it was her.

Instead I span on my heel to greet the man; I now felt double guilt because, despite my big talk to Becks, I always did what Justine said.

The man was gawky-looking, and apologetic. He was a bit like a snail wearing glasses – exactly like all those people on TV shows who are bullied and labelled Nerds, and also all those people at school that are bullied and labelled Nerds. I was embarrassed still, by my obedience – Becks was standing beside me, grinning. I wanted to get this over with quick.

Sizing the bloke up, I picked out the average size for the average man: 32w 32l (he was less than average, however, these are a slim-fitted jean and his normal size would have been too tight), and was about to point him to the changing room. But Becks said, 'Wait:'

I knew this was trouble. Becks, it turned out, was a massive, almost compulsive liar. There had been several examples of this, including convincing a barman that she was the estranged daughter of Bull's eye presenter, Jim Bowen.

'I think these might look better on this gent like we wore them out the other night.'

I was confused, we didn't wear these jeans out the other night, and I got that giddiness which comes with danger. I had it a few times with Gavin, and when I stole that picture.

She turned to me, 'Don't you think so, Dexter? The fellow's chest genuinely expanded with intrigue, possible flattery.

Becks had said to me that if Justine didn't stop pissing her off then she would start screwing customers over. But I didn't think anything of it, apart from enjoying the image at the time. I always say stuff like this. Now I was aware she was doing this, I was uncomfortable. My diaphragm contracted with the premonition of Justine telling the boss. And him telling us/ me off.

Becks didn't care – her courage was frightening. She was busy still addressing the man, feigning to suggest an idea, telling him that she wouldn't say this to everyone but –. And then she stopped, shook her head, '- Actually I'm not sure.'

He shifted, uneasy beneath his collar, exactly like the nerds do on Saved By The Bell, and asked her to continue. I used to feel sorry for those nerds.

I could see in her face the presence of evil. She swapped a look with me, then glanced up at him, kind of nervous, as if she fancied him or was shy, or fancied him and was shy, 'Well I think you could pull this off, but,' she tucked her long thick hair behind her ear, 'you might not want to.'

She was flirting, heavily. I thought of a George Formby lyric Ms Battles and I used to sing. And this man looked as if – like me – he'd never kissed anyone except his mum and his aunties (except he was older, so it was worse). He didn't know what to do next.

'Oh, well, what is it?' He asked after some time, and Becks executed a sharp, deft glance at his crotch which caused him to grow five to six inches in confidence.

If women like them like men like those, why don't women like me?

I felt bad for him, that someone as cool as Becks had made a target of him, but had to resign to the fact that this is what happens – the strong, the cool always do this to the nerds – and it was a good job I wasn't one of his sort. I was now one of the strong, cool ones. Then I recalled her 'Plus-Sized Gymnast' ruse and my innards squirmed.

'Well, sir, we wore these jeans to a club the other day, inside-out,' she said. 'and got quite a few compliments –'

'- Yeah. They loved it,' I busted in, in attempt to cement myself on Becks's side of the strong/weak divide. But the man ignored my interjection; he didn't take his eyes from Becks, didn't even glance at me. And Becks didn't either; all of a sudden I was the outsider, it was as if I was back at school, or like I was an irritating little brother, bothering his older sister and her boyfriend whilst they were trying to 'get off' with each other.

'Inside-out?' he questioned. I was surprised at his astuteness.

'Yeah,' Becks was swift in reply. 'I mean, we didn't make up the style, we actually first saw people doing it in Manchester, when we were out raving there.' She was a terrific liar.

The gawky man scratched his head, I was sure she had him on the run.

'No,' he said. 'But the pockets, they'd flap about and look a bit… Wouldn't they?' I all of a sudden wanted to poke him hard in the chest and call him a nerd, a dick head, a spaz.

I wouldn't have thought of asking about the pockets.

'Well, yeah, you see, you're right, in other jeans the pockets would look stupid,' she smiled her very warm smile, 'but these pockets are stitched tight to the leg, so inside-out they just look like patches with smart yellow detail.'

Before he could question her, she added, 'Seriously, these are gonna look really good on. Try 'em at the back. She gave a cheeky glance, 'They even made Dexter here, look sexy.'

Now he gave me a superior once-over, 'What?' he curled his bottom lip, suddenly assured, 'Even with that pink hair?'

Becks said, 'Well...Despite the pink hair,' and they both laughed together; he finished his with an, OK. When he was making his way to the fitting rooms, Becks, the nerd, the room and everything in it grew in stature and I remained the same height, my stomach telling me to jump to make myself bigger, or to stand on my tip-toes.

Becks was smiling to herself, and although this indicated Becks had just played a trick, I needed her affirmation, needed to know for sure I wasn't a nerd or on the outside, and that the man was. I said, 'I can't believe he fell for it, what a (I paused) bender!'

She was still smiling, which left me unsure of things. So I said, 'Hey, man, shall we go and watch a band or something next weekend? That'd be pretty cool.' I said this casually.

She said, 'Let's do that.' Then, 'I'll take you to see my step-brother's band.' She started laughing and I thought that she'd lied about her step-brother having a band, then noticed the nerdy dick head had emerged right in front of Justine, embarrassed and looking like the proper cock he was.

[Extract 4]

[NOTE: Having had his first attempt to woo Becky scuppered by a disastrous incident with his house mates, Dexter is intent upon winning back her affections. At this stage he has been introduced to her half-brother, Tristan, the front man of an up and coming indie rock band, with whom his has been smitten with admiration.

The letters to the child included in this chapter refer to a letter in a bottle to an imagined child he had written and placed in a pond in Swindon.]

Part 4, Chapter 8

{…]

'Ramm, this is Dexter, the winner of our branch's sales prize.' Our almost always absent boss patted me on the back. Justine at his side. Funky-house music loud in the background.

I was surprised at the H.Q management: they wore casual attire, like it was a suit, and were nothing like the images of men sold on advertising posters. As we stood, awkward on the dance floor, these balding and portly Asian men sported 501s just below their nipples, with the latest range of chequed shirts tucked tightly into their waistbands. Each held his glass of beer in front of him like a pair of soiled Y-fronts.

Ramm, and the two other blokes turned to me. Pleasant. The former held out his hand, wet and cold from the glass.

'Congratulations, young man.'

'Thanks,' I said.

I scanned their faces, tight-lipped and nodding. I was unsure if that was it, if I was supposed to go away now. Then the fatter of the three leaned forward:

'And which of our products will you spend the vouchers on, my friend?'

'Uh…' I mulled over an answer, but the first interrupted:

'What have you done to those, Dexter?' He pointed at my denim (worn inside-out as Becks and I had agreed) and nudged the fat one. They all chuckled, except Justine.

Then Ramm turned to the boss: 'Is this how you teach your staff to dress, Michael?'

Justine's eyebrows drew draggers on her forehead. The laughter deepened, and I motioned to something vague and made for the bar; the boss, Michael, calling, I'll let you know when it's award time, Dex.

He never called me Dex. In fact, apart from my interview, I can't recall him ever having spoken to me.

This was a hideous place, called Bling - all coloured glass and plastic. Its name in curling neon on the walls. My congratulatory handshake was the consequence of me having managed to arrive here – in my enthusiasm to bag Becks - inexplicably early. The only other four people present were from the Flagship branch on Regent Street. Fashionably camp, tanned individuals all sporting vintage Air Jordans. The Flag-shippers were the most revered of all Levi's staff, and set apart by a manner which yelled, We're at least slightly above all this.

In the world of Levis, they were *It*. Their store was massive, and on Saturdays it had a DJ.

I got a free beer, wandered around a bit. Checked my phone. Sat in a corner. Checked my phone. Chained three cigarettes - like Tristan chains cigarettes. I felt a bit of a dick, wearing my inside-out denim, and now had an inkling Becks had suggested it as a prank. The liar. I checked my phone.

After an hour and a half, Becks entered. She was wearing a skirt; we did not agree to wear skirts.

With a brief hug, she joined me at the bar to take in the spectacle of our boss dancing with Justine to a horrible song with no lyrics. And, I think, attempting to body pop. Her first set of words: '-Kin' hell! Look at the state of that.'

Her second: 'Is it only beer they're serving for free?'

I gestured to the array of cocktail glasses on her right. When she helped herself, I glanced at her arse, spotting the inside-out jeans below her skirt.

Maybe this was a metaphor. If it was, I didn't know for what.

In the midst of the semi-packed dance floor, two of the flag-shippers had linked arms, another was pulling his blue T-Shirt up over his hairy tummy button, feigning to strip as a dance move. The last of them was staring at us.

The long and short of the great plan I'd hatched for tonight was this: to make Becks into my girlfriend. The logistics of the plan I did not know. I scanned the venue again, for inspiration. Then, attempted a rather pathetic allusion to the night we almost got together:

'This reminds me of that first Rasclotts gig that you took me to.'

Nothing. I looked at her, concentrated as if she was studying something over the other side of the room; either my words had no effect on her at all, or she hadn't heard them above the brutality of this awful music.

I reached for another beer, about to repeat my sentence, when we were interrupted:

' – Excuse me,' said the lispy, previously staring flag-shipper. 'I love your thstyle. Where did you get the idea to wear your 505ths like that?' He was European. And riddled with envy.

He took a step forward, was now between us. After a contemplative stretch of time, Becks pulled an expression I had grown used to,

'Uh, oh my friend Rupert here,' Becks pointed at me, 'he thought of it. He's from art school. And totally, like, has the awesomest fashion concepts.'

I grinned. The intonation of that line was startling.

'Oh cool,' the guy nodded, in a way I imagine all Italians and Spanish people nod.

This was the first time I had ever been fully included in one of Becks' ruses. I felt a hum of delight throughout my frame, like it was a special moment for our relationship – like we were a team – and was desperate to join in. 'I think they would look great on you,' I said, immediately disappointed with myself.

The Italian lifted a hairy backhand to his cheek, 'You think thso?' Actually, he had just asked permission to copy us.

'I won't respect you if you don't,' Becks put in.

The flag-shipper touched his hair, 'OK. hmm. Wow.'

Becks leaned forward, and punctuated the conversation by giving him a punch on the arm, 'Do it.'

He rubbed his bicep and smiled, eyes flitting from myself to Becks to his own jeans. We watched him half-walk, half-dance away.

This was better. My confidence grew in our larrikinity. I grabbed another beer for later, suggested a vacant pink sofa, and we strolled over. Not touching, not holding hands, but things were looking good. Now I had to think of a way to move things forward.

Before I had left our house, I had put all clean linen on my bed and checked if my housemates would be out this evening. They would not. Becks and I had been sat – sometimes talking, sometimes not talking – for a good twenty minutes. During this time we'd seen the flag-shipper and one of his mates emerge from the bathroom, sporting whatever denim they'd initially worn inside-out, and we'd both used this to our conversational advantage. Laughing (what might have been) the awkwardness away, until the humour wore off. I now watched the DJ, who wore a tight red vest. Ribbed. For every girl's pleasure.

'How's Reg?' I ventured.

There were other girls in the building who looked very pretty. I imagined how great it would be if I could break dance: I would make a request to the ribbed-vested DJ, then causally lead Becks to the middle of the dance floor, and when we were there I would begin to rock on my feet. I would begin to rock and my rocking would ripen into some cool steps, and these would, by increment, encompass more and more floor space. Then I'd add some flourishes – a little tweak here, a nice bop there – and people, the pretty girls in their tight jeans and heels, would recognise

something was about to happen. They'd be drawn in toward me, but at the same time, create an imaginary circle no one would cross. That's when I'd execute my first somersault.

Bang!

And the girls, in their tight denim, heels and pert breasts would explode and Becks would think to herself, Look at all these pretty girls that fancy Dexter. But they can't have him, he's mine.

After the song finished (with me drilling out a head spin to realms of applause), she'd stride up and put her arm through mine, like she did that night on Whitechapel High Street.

Becks leaned in, 'Oh, he did something so funny yesterd-.'

'- Let's dance,' I told her, yanking her by an initially resistant wrist to her feet.

On the floor, the music was disorientating. I couldn't work out which beat I was supposed to step on, sometimes, there wasn't one at all – just sort of a swooshing or a godless scritching sound.

It was as if my feet were in really heavy shoes that were too big for me. My knees were tight. Becks nodded her head opposite.

I understood this had been quite a bad idea. I'd transformed a semi-intimate seating arrangement into a marooned-on-a-large-dance-floor-with-no-moves arrangement. Our pink sofa was now taken.

She glared at me hard in the face, as if to say, And? Well, go on then. DANCE!

I became thirsty. Swallowed a bramble bush. Then closed my eyes, and started to bounce.

After I'd got used to bouncing, I stepped right and all of a sudden, I was aware of my shoulders: as I stepped left, I lifted and dropped them. It felt OK. In fact, it felt good. I repeated it: step right/lift and drop shoulders, step left/ lift and drop shoulders.

Tonight I would make Becks mine.

I opened my eyes and breathed deep, two steps this time to the right and a variation on the shoulder movement, raising one, then switching, like Michael Jackson. No one seemed to mind.

I pulled off a sweet three-sixty turn.

Becks was getting into it, a few bars of enjoyment passed before I noted them: two men – both heavily homosexual, very strong in the jaw, and muscular, both ridiculous in inside-out denim. They may have been dancing next to us from the start. Now the slightly taller man made eye contact – acknowledging our similar dress sense – with Becks and she winked.

I thought: I recognise that wink, she's mocking them and decided this could work to my advantage. I executed a careful knee dip and then moved behind them to indulge in some gentle face-pulling. It worked out well because the one I was intending to target first actually stepped in Becks' direction – his friend only a foot or so behind him. Both performing only average dance moves.

It sidled to the back of the pair, Becks flicking me a tentative glance.

I was confident. Perhaps I thought, I should return at some point to The Swine and re-write that letter in the pond: *Dear Child, I may not have made it, but I'm in London and have managed through dance skills and masculine prowess to win the heart of a girl.*

Signed Dexter Hammond.

I began with a cheeky little spaz face. Then mocked the man by mimicking his movements – small at first, but growing into an extravagant parody of the both of them.

The initial mockee twisted and spat some words into his lover's ear, and I was almost caught; the latter moved off – perhaps to the bar – leaving, for a skittish moment, one eye of the profiled former perfectly able to view my act.

I chucked a cheeky half-smile at my soon-to-be-girl.

The rhythm of the crap music took my victim further away from me and toward Becks, steps which I followed like a mirror's reflection or an awesome mime artist. I pushed

myself right up behind him. Focused. And commenced a gyrating motion inches from his frame and similar to that which I had seen Usher perform on females in his videos.

He hadn't looked once. When I crouched slowly down, scissoring my hands to encompass his entire body, it suddenly struck me: He is very rhythmical, and also, Why is he suddenly exceptionally close to Becks. Exceptionally close.

I have thought about this moment subsequently, and a viewer placed to the side of our ménage would have been witness to the car crash of a big boned girl with a (gay looking) muscular man's leg between her own, dunking themselves into each other, and a scrawny boy millimetres away from the man's bottom, attempting to copy these actions. All three figures wearing their trousers inside-out.

It may have, to another separate party, been funny.

To me, when I tucked my head round his shoulder and discovered it: it wasn't. Becks had been laughing, but stopped. Blood welled up from my torso. I didn't see his face, until he turned and said, in a voice deeper than anticipated, 'What the fuck are you doing, mate?'

In slow motion, I glanced at Becks, who seemed concerned, then at my arms and legs and hips, still absent-mindedly affecting their previous task of grinding up to the man's lower half.

Blood now pumping through my shoulders, elbows, wrists, I gulped an apology and hit him. In the nose.

'And you were screaming it like a nine year old girl.' Becks rubbed my arm in an endeared manner. And pecked me on the cheek. It didn't sting too much.

All I could recall was a bunch of people, headed up by our boss, helping me into this taxi, and that when I flopped into that backseat, noticing the former was wearing his jeans inside-out.

Becks, with her palm still pressed to my arm, did her impression again: '"She's mine, fucking get away from her, she's my girlfriend."' She touched me on the piece of cheek that hurt the most. 'No one's ever squealed like a possessive little girl over me before, y'know.

'I'm just surprised you could do it while he had you in a head lock and was punching you in the face.'

Her chuckle wasn't entirely at me.

I didn't even get to receive my sales competition award. But somehow I'd managed, by acting stupid and getting owned by a bloke on the dance floor, to end up here. This was the best thing that could have happened, being in this cab. With her. I leaned myself onto Becks' arm, squeezed all the contact I could from the moment, and copped a sniff of her hair as our laughter fizzled. Mine with a cough.

'I lost the only fight of my entire life, Becks.' Still resting my head on her arm, I swiveled at an awkward angle to meet her eye. She was a mix of amusement and sympathy.

I wanted to ask why she'd danced like that with the bloke, and why in front of me, but didn't think this would be the best move. The air in the car grew tight when I straightened.

'Becks,' I said, aware that I'd just said her name twice in very quick succession, 'my face hurts. It's romantic. My face is hurting with romance.'

Our knees were touching, despite the previous sentence.

'When are we going to kiss?'

She looked at me, the shadow of thought moving across the whites of her eyes. Then she kissed me on the head. Stopped and hovered, as if she was mulling something over, then kissed my cheek. Then my slightly open mouth.

'Is anyone going to be nearly dead at your house?'

My head submurged between Becks' heaving bossom, I could hear the television playing from downstairs; it was an episode of Some Mother's Do 'Ave 'Em – the theme music was

unmistakable. This whole event was startling, surreal. This night was one of the first goals I'd actually ever achieved – and a seventies sitcom I remember watching with my parents provided its soundtrack. Somehow it added to the sense of occasion.

Becks fondled the back of my neck, and I did not know why at this time I should have repeated thoughts of a note in a bottle I left a child, in a town at least a hundred miles a way, but this was the fourth of those thoughts since we existed the cab. If it was still there – the bottle, that is – it would be indistinguishable from the black pond in which it lay, and the black air which it bobbed up to kiss. I kissed Becks' extended throat, ran my upper lip over the small crease where sometimes the skin from just below her chin folded.

She gasped, lightly, and pushed her hand inside my open shirt.

When we'd sprinted through the front door and straight up the stairs, I hadn't really thought of the actuality of intercourse. Of Sex.

For a while I didn't know what to do next, so remained my lips against her neck – I was embarrassingly aware of my sudden boner. Becks swooped down and met my lips as she fidgeted to locate herself. She arched her back, pressing most of her semi-exposed bosom into my body.

At some point I would be inside her.

Now we were moving, now we were side by side, which conjured – I don't know why – the word slalom. I had never in any film seen love-making begin like this. It was always more fluid. And I hadn't expected to be thinking of anything other than her body, but –

Dear child, I am in Peckham, frollicking with the woman I think I love. My flat mates are downstairs –

John Wesley's family were fleeing a burning home in the picture on my wall. Becks grabbed, impatient, at my genitals – balls first, then my throbbing chap in an artful upward sweep. I inhaled, not meaning to, certain it was the girl's job to do that stuff; I didn't want her to be the one that, when retelling this story, was able to say, And he was fucking loving it! Involuntarily, I

thrust myself into her hand, through her hand and up against her crotch. Gavin called this dry-humping.

I revealed myself above the waistband of my jeans, dick sensitive to the night air blowing through my open window – the singular wholly naked thing between us. My feet ran up the insides of my inside-out trousers like they were a treadmill sliding away. It was difficult to undress at the same time as securing affection on at least one part of her body, and I felt clumsy now with both my hands slipping down my boxers. But then I was away.

Dear Child, I am butt naked for the first time in front of - This is probably a letter you should save until your mid-teens.

[Do not open until you are in your mid-teens]

Dear Child,

I am butt naked for the first time in front of a female and my blushing virginity is taking its final bow.

She grappled with her left hand my bare arse, ran fingers through my hair with the right, pulling it taut. Her skirt was up, her trousers half-down, my bursting johnson edging itself forward; she said:

Wait.

[Do not open until you are in your mid-teens]

Dear Child,

I want to clue you up on some things about sexual congress. For example, how disconcerting it is to be told by a girl you think you love, but with whom you've never done it, that she is on the pill.

We were both naked now, beneath the covers. When I'd said out loud the words No Condoms? they had the ring of a grown up to it, or the ring of the promiscuous teen, which I enjoyed. She'd made me turn around while she disrobed; now the certainty of her inner thighs, her tummy was parked beneath my skin. We kissed employing fully the use of our tongues and I compelled myself to touch with one hand her hip, the back of her knee, the inside of her groin; when she said, Come on then, it was inevitable.

Gavin once called this bare-back. It was a lot different, I thought, to a wank. Better. From the moment I met her I had to hold my breath.

I did the best I could with what little experience (none) that I had, bouncing a little upon her like I'd imagined should be done, until she clutched me definitively. Then it all became like proper business:

[Do not open until you are in your mid-teens]

Dear Child, when you are unbearably anxious about premature ejaculation - due not only to the fact that you are having sex for the first time, but that your excitement is increased by it being with someone with whom you are in love, someone who is making audible grunts which sound to you like gratefulness – you may find it a helpful distraction to write imaginary letters of advice in your head.

I was never going to last the haul. I looked over at the Wesley portrait and thrust. She exhaled hard, which made me pulse. She ruffled my hair, I kissed her neck. It was nearly over, I could sense it, for me.

Dear Child, what might be an idea is –

My instinct now was to keep very still, knowing I might recuperate some calm in my welling testicles if I had only a few seconds respite, but this wasn't viable. She breathed, I tingled, she joined in my rhythmic pounding, I –

Dear Child, no one should underestim –

We were – the only word to actually describe it is – pumping, and there was nothing I could do to halt my course. Fuck, I said, as she smacked her lips on my face:

Dear Child,

I scanned the room for anything to focus on, but the room was as light-headed as me. It was happening and I couldn't.

Dear.

Child.

Umpfff. She said my name and it was finished.

Analysis of Novel-in-Progress and Possible New Directions

As stated in the introduction to Part Two, the exploration of an extended work of fiction, written alongside my theoretical project, commenced as an attempt to problematize particular attitudes towards white working-class masculinity, perceived as having recently emerged within mainstream British society. Having presented salient samples taken from this process above, this chapter will subject the discourse embodied by its protagonist to a similar analytical treatment as those of previous texts examined. This will begin with a brief outline of political and economic framework, which in this context is the emergent discourse of New Labour. The protagonist in his narrative environment will then be introduced. Following this, the character of Dexter Hammond will be read with respect to his stand out quality and his relationship to women, the grounds by which, as with previous chapters, his response to his subject-position can take place.

By employing the socio-political theory applied throughout my thesis thus far, the discursive nature of *Big Time*, my novel-in-progress, will be investigated in order to establish whether the objectives conceived at the genesis of this text have been achieved, or whether, in fact, at the heart of this text lies the same problematic qualities observed in the other representations of classed subjects. Furthermore, in opening up my initial creative text to a similar scrutiny as those who have come before, the manner in which I have come to conceptualise classed male bodies and their representations will be exposed, providing a basis for discussion of my more recent response below. Lastly, and in line with my re-conceptualisation of representations of the working-class male, questions will be developed with respect to the nature of his production, which will provide a theoretical basis through which the conventions of mainstream literary narrative can be examined in subsequent sections.

New Labour and the Mythology of the Third Way

In 1997, The Labour Party emerged victorious from the general election to take charge of Britain, replete with new ideological policies, that, after nearly two decades of Conservative government, 'seemed to offer new possibilities for change [,..] particularly for those concerned with addressing inequalities' (Crompton 2). Following the Thatcher years, characterised for some by 'scenes of state violence, foreclosures and evictions [and] huge unemployment, (Friel 876) 'New Labour', spearheaded by Tony Blair, won national consensus convincingly (Driver & Martell 68). However, while the triumph of New Labour was clearly a product of the public's distaste for the politics that had come before, and a readiness for something (or anything) new, its victory can be understood as having been achieved through re-branding and the successful creation of a new mythology rather than through any substantial change in policy from that of the preceding Conservative Government.

Concerned with establishing a politics that would secure the confidence of the middle-classes, whilst also attempting to attract those disenfranchised by the Tory laissez faire approach, Blair and his party reconfigured the language of the previous governments to invent a 'centre-left' rhetoric couched in the mythologies of 'Modern Britain' and the discourse of the 'Third way' (Driver & Martell 69). With the Conservatives traditionally privileging individual interest over that of the collective, on the one hand, and the problematic (as it was now seen) Old Labour system of welfare 'dependency culture' on the other, Blair proposed a 'popular politics' purportedly able to reconcile these two positions, which until this point had been *wrongly* regarded as antagonistic (Blair quoted Driver & Martell 84). Through the employment of loaded terminology, like 'inclusion' and 'equal worth', New Labour suggested that a neoliberal economy and social justice could each be employed in support of the other [24] (ibid). This could be achieved through embracing two important issues of 'empowerment', which were the re-working of the welfare state and the expansion of opportunity for small and medium sized business. Articulated as 'a hand-up,

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[24] An fuller explanation of how this would be achieved is given by Driver & Martell p84

not a hand-out,' the rebranded back to work system of benefits was now 'targeted to *empower* individuals and remove them from the welfare net' (Friel 884). Instead of creating a culture of dependency, as their forebears had, through engagement with new employment and training schemes under the new system, those without a job would be assisted financially, whilst they focused on regaining *meaningful* employment. This served to provide a governmental framework of conditionality, emphasising a 'something-for-something' culture (Horton 39). The second mechanism of Empowerment claimed that through appropriate regulation of the economic system, entrepreneurial opportunities would be presented to people of all class backgrounds, which would further grow the economy and create a 'society,' as Blair put it, 'which celebrates successful entrepreneurs just as it does artists and footballers (quoted in Friel 887). However, established through this rhetoric is a discourse which, like that of the Tory Party, nurtures an extreme capitalist aesthetic by placing responsibility predominantly on the individual; its subtext suggesting that if, after all of the help provided by the new government, the subject could still not acquire employment or succeed in business, then it must be to do with a flaw in the individual's character; the system had done its part (Valentine &Harris, 2014, 87). This ideological stance is underwritten by New Labour's 'modern' take on education. Under the new, reconfigured education system, admittance would be provided for all rungs of the social ladder to gain higher qualifications on which a heavier emphasis would be placed for future employment. It was anticipated that increased interest in higher education from employers would propel a greater sense of competition in students to acquire the properties necessary to attract employment interest (Shaw 170-1), which in turn would produce a subject (self) that would strive to acquire the right kind of properties in order to be a valuable commodity (Skeggs 75-6). This, again, reaffirmed the weight of personal responsibility upon the individual, establishing its sentiment in subjects from an early age. Locating an argument in terms of individual ability to achieve (in this case, a self-entrepreneurship), it supposes the most deserving candidates and the hardest workers will obtain

the rewards. In doing so, it supposes, as with the Tory discourse, a personal failure of character for those who do not do well within this system, thus absolving the system itself.

Articulated as 'equal respect and consideration', these new policies fostered the notion of an equal opportunity for all to rise in the economic social world (Shaw169). But, as Crompton observes, rather than absolute equality, which would necessitate the redistribution of wealth and entail a major socio-economic upheaval, the emphasis here is placed upon the individual's capacity to capitalize upon an 'equality of resources' available, placing the liability firmly upon each subject to achieve within the existing socio-symbolic terms of capitalist society (Crompton 136-7). In fact, as Hall argues, this style of 'Entrepreneurial Governance' modeled itself entirely on the neo-liberalist system of free market business. (Hall, 2003) Under this arrangement, people from all backgrounds were subject to the prevailing rules of the bourgeois economic system, whilst 'prior historical classificatory schemes of value' as Skeggs puts it (75), produced by those same socio-economic circumstances, goes ignored. What this exposes then, for all of the comfort of the term 'inclusivity', is the reproduction of the pre-existing Darwinian discourse of neo-liberalism (see Chapter 7). Within the rhetoric of equality, packaged as access for all to the mechanisms of social mobility and the provisions for entrepreneurial ascension, the uneven field of capitalism is disguised further as neutral territory and the ground for the ascription of socio-symbolic values (discussed throughout this thesis) is made even more fertile. By enshrouding the economic and cultural realities of many lower-class subjects in the new terminology of 'Inclusion', the difference in the 'portfolios of capitals' between various social groups, discussed by Bourdieu, is hidden behind a language of smoke and mirrors, whilst the values ascribed to certain competencies (personal properties) of each subject are extenuated and normalised. Within, for example, the new discourse apparent through the repackaged system of education, the lower-class student (irrespective of background) is expected to perform as well as his/her peer who has inherited the skills of his/her well-educated middle-class advantaged parents. In concealing the issues of the inherited cultural capital and economic advantage of some subjects,

the onus is placed solely upon an implied innate intellectual property (of high symbolic value) – a mythology itself created by this discourse. Furthermore, failure of the lower-class student to achieve is not seen as the failure of a social system which does not recognised his/her uneven starting position, but is instead re-mythologized as an individualized form of cultural inadequacy (Lawler 440). Similar outcomes are also prescribed for the subject who lacks the personal properties to make the most of the training schemes given as part of the new 'workfare' programme, and even (as has already been demonstrated in the example of John Self) the entrepreneur who fails in business. Through this new perspective, those unable to take the governmental assistance given by New Labour are identified as a hindrance, through a fault of their own, to the development of Blair's Modern Britain, and thus re-constituted, as in the Thatcherite regime, as 'immobile, useless and redundant' (Skeggs 80). Conversely, what this discourse also produces is an imaginary subject, an invented posterboy/girl, as it were, who embodies the mythological politics of the New Labour government. This lower-class character, a protagonist in the narrative of the third way's claim for equality, possesses the innate qualities to utilize resources provided by the new government, rising socially against the backdrop of all his/her culturally inadequate peers to provide an example of the successful marrying of previous antagonistic politics. It is by these terms in which New Labour re-imagined the British socio-economic landscape, the significance of this conceptual shift will now be examined in relation to an attempt, as part of this thesis, to create a new representation of lower-class masculinity.

Introducing Dexter Hammond: The Great Bright Hope

Dexter Hammond is a teenager, whose trajectory is traced within a picaresque narrative, detailing his formative experiences at home and in education, before encompassing broader experiences in the city of London. He hails from a working-class background in Swindon, a former farming town located in the south-west of England, commonly seen as populated by average or even stupid

people (Derbyshire Swindon? No, it's Swindumb). Younger than the working-class characters examined throughout this thesis, he is found in the unique position of being in mainstream education, located at the beginning of the novel within a Further Education GNVQ programme to gain workable skills in Leisure and Tourism. This means, in part at least, the pressing economic concerns of his predecessors are taken out of the equation. Situated in the late-nineties, under the discourse of New Labour's 'Third Way,' his characterisation can be read as an attempt to problematize the received notions displayed throughout this thesis in much of the meaning ascribed to working-class male subjects, reconfiguring its manifestations, questioning its authenticity. Ostensibly, his differences may appear to disrupt aspects of the literary production of masculinity, which, as explained in Chapter Five, operates necessarily as part of the ongoing relationship of signifiers that reconstruct prior simulations. However, analysed in the same terms as the previous working-class protagonists, and with respect to the socio-economic backdrop in which he exists, similar questions are raised. These will now be examined with respect to the conventions of successful characterisation outlined earlier (chapter 5).

Dexter Hammond: the New Mythology of the Working Class?

'All deserve to be given an equal chance in life to fulfill the potential with which
they were born.' (Brown 1999: quoted in Shaw 40)

First encountered in the prologue to *Big Time*, Dexter demonstrates many qualities which fall outside of the recognised manner in which the working-class man conventionally articulates his identity. Though there is no explanation apparent for his deviation – he hails from the same background as his peers, he lives in a hetero-normative family whose father attempts to force 'normality' upon him – he stands out from the beginning as different. Preferring instead to adorn his body with costumes, whether dressing as a homosexual pop star, the queen or in dying his hair pink, he does not engage typically with the hyper-hetero-normative behavior produced in working-

class males (displayed by social practices in line with economic needs – see Chapter Two) and is thus situated as the outsider ('an oddball'). This status is qualified by a number of incidences in which Dexter departs from the normative manner socially expected of young working-class males. From the starting position that he is 'above' the typical masculine banter of his peers, he rejects this important ritual of their 'particular brand of masculinity' associated with lower-class men, here expressed through social exchanges in the sports dressing room:

> He's always been uneasy around all the noise and these other unruly boys and also, what he believes is called banter […] They're so rough with each other - back slaps, hair tousles - and he doesn't like it, and he's always known he's marginally above all that. (Extract 1, P122)

In line with the hetero-normative codes recognised by Andrew Parker (Parker 32), he is duly ostracised by his teammates. As Canaan has observed, the importance placed by working-class males upon physical performance (here understood in terms of sporting prowess) disqualifies Dexter from establishing himself on terms valorized by other working-class males, and provides a pretext for Dexter's punishment: 'one of the […] boys says to him, It's all your fault you prick, even my nan would have scored that. It was a tap-in' (Extract 1, 122). Here, his masculinity, coded as sporting dexterity, is reduced to that of an elderly lady, a sentiment that both serves to humiliate the protagonist and confirm his status as an outsider. However, with respect to the first property of successful characterisation expressed earlier, if he is not willing/ able to compete within the normative arenas of physical masculinity, he will have to establish prominence against his peers in other ways. He departs from its usual quantification on grounds of physicality, by replying: 'Fuck off, (..,) at least I'm not stupid. Bone Dick's got more brains than you in the bone in his dick' (ibid). Dexter lacks the physical competence of his teammates, so attempts to institute a different system of measurement, by which his intellect is to be valued higher than his teammates' physicality. In doing so, what emerges is a masculine capital funded by the same socio-symbolic system exposed in the early chapters of this thesis. Moreover, the unexplained

nature of his aesthetic disposition which favours his seemingly *inherent* intellect (his father is a builder, his mother a housewife, neither value education), embodies, in many ways, the New Labour discourse, discussed above, that neutralizes the notion of a pre-existing socio-economic fissure. Departing from the narrow politics of the dressing room in which typical working-class male bodies are able to establish themselves, he employs the wider social narrative of the middle-class gaze (explained earlier and supported by New Labour); in which the lower-class body is vulgarized against the valorization of the middle-class mind. As with the texts examined throughout, this dichotomy articulated by Dexter actions the same schema of bourgeois distinction employed to establish a symbolic hierarchy which favours the set of values of a particular group, thus inscribing upon them a higher social importance, and in so doing reproducing the ideology expounded by Brown in the epigraph above. The outworking of this ideology, displayed earlier in the work of Baron, Pyke, et al, is shown to generate greater power and ultimate victory for those it valorizes. This is substantiated later in the text of Dexter's narrative, when he retells how he had outwitted these same boys to claim full revenge:

> Exploitati[ng] my mother's job as kit-washer. I seized one shirt at random from the bag of freshly cleansed uniforms, and drew a large penis with a marker pen (in the place one would find a number on the shirts of professionals). Where the pro's name would be, I had written the wearer's full title, Ima Bender. (Extract 1, 127)

After a number of the opposing team laugh at one boy unwittingly admitting to his homosexuality, the game is abandoned, and the ensuing fallout results in Dexter being expelled from the football club. The victory of Dexter's wit and mind over the bodies of his teammates functions on two levels here. Firstly, the body which, in the preceding pages was strong enough to exert physical power over Dexter's own, is inscribed physically and symbolically with a language that renders it illegitimate, humiliating it by the same terms in which it is produced. The hyper-hetero-normative identity, embodying a masculine discourse which excludes those outside its parameters is labeled as its Other: a homosexual. Thus, all manifestations of that same dominant masculinity are

coerced into ridiculing one of their own, acknowledging their own vulnerability to Dexter's intellect, while he basks in the glory of one-upmanship played on his terms. Secondly, in creating a situation in which it is no longer possible for him to co-exist alongside his teammates, Dexter is removed from the club. Through this result, he achieves dominion over the very system of masculinity which – through his father's normative behavior in placing him alongside stereotypical sites of young working-class masculinity – positioned him as inferior and outsider in the first place. The overall triumph is found both in physical removal from the group which he sees himself as better than, and in symbolically proving his belief. This victory, which succeeds in terms of protagonist believability by adhering to the rules set out in Part One, Chapter Five, actually reproduces particular aspects of the symbolic economy articulated earlier by Canaan: that those able to establish themselves in the employment of mind over body are able, ultimately, to wield the power. However, Dexter's circumstances, as demonstrated above, adduce no evidence of the socio-economic privilege associated with the beneficiaries of the system outlined by Canaan. Instead, Dexter's success presents the same mythological discourse found in the rhetoric of the Third Way. Though he emerges, necessarily in terms of the novel, as the hero of this exchange, in employing the discursive language produced by the existing value system, re-appropriated by New Labour as 'Inclusion', he recreates the socio-symbolic cleft between 'classes'. Instead of problematizing the reductive social narratives which posit the working-class as embodiment of vulgarized traits typical of physical masculinity, the polarizing effect of the 'outstanding' Dexter, which contrives to destabilize these conceptions, serves to re-enforce them in the rest of the fictional cast. His prominent example as hero casts the shadow of New Labour's third way and its 'failure of the individual' rhetoric across them. In so doing the representation of political conflict attempted in the site of Dexter's character is forfeited to the narrative constraints of the mainstream novel.

Dexter-sexual

In a similar vein to the properties expressed in Dexter's 'stand out' characteristic, his relationship to women can also be read, initially, as a response to the symbolic politics of the lower-classed male analysed in the body of this thesis. Particularly pertinent is the question raised with respect to misogynistic behaviour by post-second wave feminism, and the manner in which this is demonized by the middle-class, in order to distract from the wider patriarchal evils committed by men of higher social standing. As observed in Chapter 7 above, a period of economic affluence, a shift in production and development of new technologies enabled space for the emergence of a feminist discourse which challenged the systemic patriarchy at work in society. This, in turn, produced a new generation of theorists within the tradition of literary criticism who contested the treatment of women in literature, impacting directly the manner in which the working-class male protagonist could express (understood by the terms delineated above) his masculinity. In respect to the denunciation of the working-class male protagonist's dominance over women as a vehicle for class resistance, Dexter eschews this aspect of masculine performance. This is framed early on in the narrative, within the sexualized conversation with Gavin and Sideburns, in which Dexter demonstrates his discomfort and lack of experience with the objectification of women. In answer to Gavin's question, 'Which one of those two munters would you bang? If you had to?' (Extract 1, p135) he is perplexed, and forced to guess at answers that someone of this misogynistic persuasion would be expected to give. Beginning with 'it's a toughy,' then oddly just shouting the word 'sex', he punctuates his involvement in this conversation with commentary exposing his lack of confidence and authority in this arena: 'each second,' he says, they were 'closer to finding me out,' and later, 'pressure was building in the back of my lungs because I didn't know…' (ibid). Finally having drawn upon an allegory of shopping to illustrate his guessed-at point, he is corrected by the experienced misogynistic voice of Gavin, whose response further deprecates the female in question by imposing the image of sexually degrading subservience.

What is clear, firstly, is that Dexter is 'playing' at lower-class misogyny. This is an element of cultural tourism, expressed by his awareness of the functions of the symbolic economy

involved with the grading of hierarchal social practices. This knowledge of the symbolic economy, as with his intellect, is inexplicable in relation to his socio-economic background and his cultural experience amongst his family and peers, and thus emerges as an innate quality of his character, which sets him apart from the rest. A helpful correlative is found in his description of the 'dichotomic gap in [his] wardrobe' later in the novel, with 'The Flamboyant […] on its left and The College Clobber (inclusive of stuff purchased in JD Sports) on its right' (Extract 2, 138). The gap between his consumer practices on the left and the practices of Gavin and Sideburns which he appropriates on the right of his wardrobe demonstrates his knowledge of the distinguishing features of taste which he chooses to employ at will, articulating a distance between his aesthetic disposition and ignorance of his peers. The changes he makes to his apparel, dressing several notches 'down', as it were, links Dexter's appearance with the vulgarity and behaviour of the lower-classes observed in Owen Jones' *CHAVS* (2011). In the same way, the disposition exposed with respect to females in Chapter Two (Extract 1) establishes an awareness of the clear gap between the base, derogatory attitude of his peers and Dexter, who only chooses to 'wear this behaviour' for a while. Similar to the manner in which Dexter's 'distinctive outstanding character' asserts itself above the representations of his football teammates previously, Dexter's actual 'innate' attitude towards females displays a certain currency for him as the protagonist.

As opposed to the obvious misogyny embodied in the masculine performances of Gavin and Sideburns, any romantic encounter Dexter experiences throughout the novel – from the school girl who propositions him, through his eventual girlfriend, to the teenage groupie of his hero's band – actually comes as a result of a trusting friendship/ relationship that has been built up over time. This is especially evident in the trajectory of his relationship with his girlfriend, Becky, where the large gap between sexual encounters delineated in the working class narratives earlier and the attitude of his peers and the one Dexter nurtures is striking. Firstly, Becks is not, as the pattern suggested by Fisher, Seaton and Lampton, what is conventionally understood as attractive, as Dexter articulates: 'I tried to depict her naked. She was bigger than the girl I envisioned first

having sex with' (see Part 4 Chapter 4 on wordpress). The subsequent interest in her that he displays throughout the rest of the novel suggests that Dexter's view of women has become, as opposed to that of the other working-class protagonists, one which is not built upon objectification, but upon a humanizing interest in the personal qualities she possesses. His attraction to her (though apparent initially) forms over a period of time, as across chapters a common ground is established over which Becks (uncharacterically for a working-class masculine narrative) often takes the lead. This common ground manifests predominantly in terms of disposition toward their employment experience and in terms of books and music (culture). Becks usually takes the lead in the expression of each of these areas. For example, at the genesis of their relationship she assumes authority by introducing Dexter to new literature,

> She handed [the book] to me in a gesture that I knew meant I could borrow it, so I took it in my hands and thanked her. Then for absolutely no reason I just told her the truth, Actually I don't know that much about literature. But, I added, I'm keen to learn, and suggested perhaps she could recommend a few more books (Extract 3, p146).

The humility with which Dexter approaches this relationship, establishing a willingness to be vulnerable, and to give authority to women, stands in juxtaposition to the notion of the masculine need to dominate, displayed through Sean Nixon. The power Becks establishes over this cultural common ground creates the terms by which the relationship continues.

Becky decides what is going to happen sexually, and when, after several chapters of anxiety, Dexter finally asks, 'Becks […] when are we going to kiss?' she takes time in her decision, before she engages:

> she looked at me, the shadow of thought moved across the whites of her eyes. Then she kissed me on the head. Stopped and hovered, as if she was mulling something over, then kissed my cheek. Then my slightly open mouth (Extract 4, 159).

Dexter's timidity here stands in full contrast to the courting rituals of the other working-class protagonists examined. In stark comparison to Tommy Johnson, for example, who along with his peers confidently picks up and uses women he meets in clubs, and also the cock-sureness of two-timing Seaton and Fisher, Dexter dare not risk initiating overt sexual contact, instead he refrains, letting Becks take complete control with this respect. Furthermore, when Becks does advance to the act of sex, Dexter concedes his inexperience:

> I hadn't really thought of the actuality of intercourse. Of Sex. […]For a while I didn't know what to do next, so […]Becks swooped down and met my lips as she fidgeted to locate herself. […] pressing most of her semi-exposed bosom into my body (Extract 4, 160).

And shortly afterwards, making a further concession:

> I inhaled, not meaning to, certain it was the girl's job to do that stuff; I didn't want her to be the one when retelling this story that was able to say,
> And he was fucking loving it! (ibid)

This vulnerability commonly associated with the female as the subject of masculine banter, here is subverted to the degree that Dexter becomes its possible victim. This mounts a challenge to the typical representations of working-class masculinity. The politics of class conflict can be read here in terms of Dexter's refusal to play by the rules of the current system, whereby the misogyny expressed in lower-class manifestations is demonized, deflecting attention from the wider institutional patriarchy of the bourgeoisie. This bears striking comparisons to a neoliberal agenda disguised by the rhetoric in the mythological Third Way. Dexter understands that he cannot express (in what has become in this thesis) a conventional class resistance – through the sexualized manner he relates to women, because of the demonization which would ensue. Moreover, he understands that these same systems of patriarchy operating in wider institutional levels are enabled by the distraction created by this demonization. In response, he attempts to establish a new politics whereby both sides of the class divide are recognised as outdated and acknowledged as flawed. He opts for a 'Third Way': eschewing masculine domination completely, and becoming a vulnerable male. This resembles the manner in which the Third Way

of New Labour, acknowledging the flawed nature of the First and Second Ways attempted to establish a new political discourse. However, as with the rhetoric in which New Labour's politics is couched, what actually manifests, in its subtext, is a disguised reconstitution of the existing socio-symbolic values, which demonizes the lower-class individual. In this case, Dexter's pro-feminism, which emerges (as does his intellect) as an innate quality separate from his socio-economic background, is a mythology which reproduces the same moral valuing system that villainizes the other individuals of his class. His privilege as the protagonist affords him primacy over all other working-class characters, and in this way his rise above the misogyny, which is a flaw in the over-riding system of patriarchy and thus a condition of all men, is only measured against of the behaviour of his class peers, thus it only serves to project onto his peers and the notion that they lack the innate ability to be moral towards women.

The sections above have set out the terms by which New Labour created for itself a new identity. Attempting to negotiate a space for its re-invented self, and to reclaim the belief of its audience of voters, New Labour sought to encompass the neo-liberal economic values of its governmental predecessor which benefitted a largely middle-class demographic, whilst also displaying a concern for the working-class roots from which it sprang. In order to do this, it reconfigured the language within which its neoliberal values could be understood, conjuring political policies which claimed to provide an opportunity for all to enter into the successful economic systems of 'Modern' Britain. Through new mechanisms in education, welfare (workfare) and investment in small businesses, it can be seen to have invited the working-class into the structure framed by a middle-class value system. Neutralizing the socio-economic realities and the social imbalance of capitals in all senses of the word, New Labour developed a mythological narrative creating a fictional lower-class character (not rooted in the history of any recognizable class as a result of economic or social capital). This character would, by valorized skills inexplicably inherent at birth, be able to discard former class narratives and transcend the social ladder, employing the new political

mechanisms which it had set in place. The reality of New Labour's Third Way is that its lower-class protagonist polarized the actual lower-classes by placing responsibility firmly upon the individual to succeed, reproducing in turn the flawed (underclass) subject, who served to deflect blame from an unworkable neoliberal system, and became its scapegoat.

Through adherence to the conventions of the mainstream novel delineated above, Dexter Hammond can be read as the fulfillment of the Third Way New Labour narrative. The pre-requisition that, as the protagonist of the novel, he must 'stand out' from the cast of characters leads him to *inexplicably* adopt the same qualities of intellect and disposition, valorized by the bourgeoisie, in order to sustain his coherence as a lead character in the mind of the reader. Moreover, his victory in this sense over the other characters and his more appropriate behaviour towards women, manifest greatly in his relationship to Becky, distances the remaining, less exposed lower-class characters, who, as McKee would have it, necessarily need to be reduced to a few typical and recognisable traits. Within this practice, what emerges is the embodiment of a discourse, whose weight and privilege as primary character situates other individuals as 'failures', or as Skeggs states above, 'immobile, useless and redundant.' In this sense then, as perhaps with earlier narratives examined, the novel in its mainstream conventions becomes a problematic arena for the exploration of class conflict and resistance and needs to be examined further.

The Problematic Novel

All writing acts, Kenneth Plummer observes, 'attempt to impose an understanding upon a chaotic and untidy world' (195). Some of the means most relevant to this work, through which the mainstream novel endeavours to impose a given understanding, have been well examined here in terms of character traits. However, having attempted to negotiate this form in the production of the creative section of this thesis, as illustrated above, it has become clear that the merits of particular conventions of the mainstream narrative are questionable in the context of what *Big Time* sets out

to achieve. Expressed by the examination above and that of previous texts, these conventions, reliant upon 'a string of dominant cultural […] assumptions which are built into [their] structure' (Plummer 195), make difficult the presentation of any lower-classed subjects who deviate from received mainstream notions. This is partly due to the assumptions of one consistent 'whole, fixed person' whose meaning is developed through of series of stages or images (ibid), and partly because inherent in these conventions is also the dichotomy between major and minor characters, heroes and villains, whose representations also necessitate the appearance of fixed, stable identities (Stanley 14). Both of these conventions, as exposed in the analysis of the fictions, and in the social theorists employed throughout, can be read as part of the socio-historical manner in which shared meanings (doxa) about the working-class have been created and sustained by the bourgeois economy at large to form and retain its own constitution from the outside (Lawler 431). The common assumptions of the classed human subject, and their reference points in the simulation of these, can thus be seen as a product of middle-class values, established throughout history. The effect of these constrictions, as illustrated above, can perhaps then be read as a device of the middle-class schema, thus serving to subvert by its nature the original agenda of *Big Time* and the agenda of class conflict in the novels examined earlier, reproducing instead the socio-symbolic political narrative (and thus a middle-class gaze) of the historic period in which each novel was produced.

What has been shown, in contrast, throughout this thesis' investigation is that, opposed to the assumptions presented by the narrative conventions of the novel, 'people do not arrive in the world perfectly formed […] and then stay pristine and unchanged until vanishing at the other end of life' (Stanley 9-10). They are, instead, 'embedded, dialogic, contingent' subjects produced within a universe of socio-economic contexts (Plummer 196). Perhaps the most important discovery, in light of this, for the production of the creative section of this work has been the need to seek out other forms of representation which, in contrast to the mainstream narrative form that

stabilizes middle-class distinctions, allows for the multiplicity of voices which come to exemplify the many shifting identities of any one individual.

A Critical Humanism

One interesting possibility for the subversion of conventional narrative forms is presented by recent examinations of auto/biography with respect to its potential as criticism. The citations from the previous section are taken from two critical humanist theorists whose work has been influential over this new discipline. Both note the ideological crossover between the creation of a fictionalized character and the attempt to contextualize one's self within a framework of narrative, proposing that there is an extent to which each, traditionally, can be read as a product of the time, space and audience of the historical moment in which it was produced (Plummer citing the work of Stanley, 88). Yet, having come to understand this, Plummer declares that these traditional conventions do not need to be adhered to (89). Indeed, the critical examination of the ways in which ideological systems of representation have been produced by these traditional conventions has informed, he says, 'new writing [which] attempts to reassemble texts with a different focus [in which] the logics of speech and writing are fractured and rendered both "unstable" and less coherent,' and difference and multiplicity are celebrated (Plummer 197). Stanley exemplifies this new approach through the examination of a mode of women's writing. Along with Lyn Thomas and Emma Webb she affirms political agency involved with writing critically about the personal, which 'fictionalizes aspects of biography, blurs boundaries, [and] makes up some characters, including potentially the narrative "I" (14). In this mode, she asserts, 'a realistic version of "truth" as something single and unseamed is jettisoned, and emphasis instead is placed upon the assertion of particular perspectives (ibid). David Jackson proposes a similar practice, pertinent to this thesis, with an emphasis upon scrutinizing his own formations of masculinity in a critical, non-linear auto/biography, the centre of which, he suggests

is a critical deconstruction of how we were historically and socially formed
as masculine subjects in a patriarchal/capitalist society, at a particular time
and how that can lead on to conventional masculine [and class] relations and
identities being changed and restructured (263).

Both the approaches of the feminist literature displayed in Stanley and the critical auto/biographicalisation of the construction of masculinity in Jackson suggest alternative methods to the creative practice of representing working-class masculinity, locating in the 'I' different manifestations of potential to subvert traditional received narratives. It is in response to these that the next section will outline changes to the mode in which this thesis approaches its own creative practice.

Enter Wayne Holloway-Smith

So the critical humanist readings of narrative lives in auto/biographical and fictional works, given by Stanley and Plummer, present an avenue for investigative expression of subjectivities that departs from conventional forms. Here potential is exposed for re-addressing the creative work of this thesis, which, as displayed in the above analysis, had become problematic in the form of a mainstream novel. This has forced a re-examination of the texts written to this point, pointing in turn to an obvious subjectivity which has thus far not been tackled. Many of the possibilities ruptured in the new modes of writing displayed by the critical humanist authors focus upon the importance of the narrative 'I'. Thus it is at this point that I choose to enter this text.

In re-reading the script of my developing thesis alongside the subsequent re-examination of my creative work, the shifting sense of self-identity which forms throughout my analysis of the subject matter becomes apparent. Identifying as male, and coming from a 'lower-class' background, my location as a subject of the discourses I have been coming to understand has been consistently challenged and shaped throughout, as I have been forced, with each successive

chapter, to re-evaluate my own position in the context of the emerging critical perspectives on class and masculinity. Indeed, the radical alterations in my own trajectory throughout this thesis, both intellectually and in terms of the capital I have acquired, and the new status I will ultimately obtain upon its completion (namely the title of Doctor), situates me as a primary text for scrutiny.

As a published poet and under the title Master of the Arts, there were already questions surrounding my working-class identity, and the emerging academic (right kind of) knowledge I accumulated over the course of my PhD bolstered the sense of shifting location, within the established understanding of the class system. However, my socio-cultural experiences, my family background and the allegiance I felt with my peer group (all of which are grouped together under Bourdieu's term 'Habitas') engendered a feeling of displacement in new environments in which I moved (Bourdieu's 'Field'), and continue to do so. Although my perspective of certain socio-cultural positions continues to change, the fact of having taught in institutional education for over two years, and having been published academically and as an author has not, up to this point, altered the fact that I still identify with the 'classed' background into which I was born. I embody certain practices and tastes with respect to consumption of clothing and food, and have a particular peer group who would, within the socio-symbolic framework delineated above, all be classified within the 'lower orders'. What I have come to understand as my identity claims a certain kinship to the fractured, multiple narratives revealed in the work of Plummer, Stanley et el, and thus presents itself as a prime candidate for literary representation. So having acknowledged the arguments for the need to display the fractured multiple narratives of my shifting identity, I perceived an opening for my own representation as a social agent expressed through a collection of poetry. In poetry, I am offered the prospect of a more flexible approach, in that I am no longer restricted to one fixed narrative voice operating in a somewhat linear time frame. Moreover, I am permitted to enter the text, myself the representation of a particular non-linear masculine identity, and perform through a series of separate pages an engagement with the processes of my social construction in a variety of forms and voices, akin to Jackson, whilst producing the biographical

fictionalized perspectives, engendered by different time periods and stages in my development across the four years of research, and perhaps even beyond.

Having perceived this opening, it seems pertinent to consider how class politics and identity have been previously performed in arena of contemporary British poetry, in order to understand where my practice, with its particular contestation of culturally fixed identity, can be situated, and what, if any, challenges this new terrain may present to my project.

Them & [Uz] & Me

Interestingly, Neil Roberts observes that 'class becomes visible in poetry only when a working-class point of view is being articulated. Middle-classness,' he says, 'tends to be invisible' ('Class and Poetry' 215). Poetry, then, may be understood as a bourgeois tradition, therefore, explicit voicing of middle-class concerns is not necessary; the creation and appreciation of poetry is a practice into which these are already coded. An obvious relationship emerges here to the wider socio-symbolic narrative delineated throughout this thesis, by which particular sets of individuals can be included and excluded. Aesthetic lines are drawn, in this case, through knowledge of traditional poetic form and deference to the existing canon (Roberts 215-23) valorising groups of individuals who possess these attributes and capabilities of comprehension. Accordingly, 'classed' masculine responses can be found within this arena, exemplified by discussion of the work and careers of four recent poets.

The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth Century English Poetry places Tony Harrison at the beginning of its 'class' chapter. Harrison famously confronts his class concerns head-on, unflinching in much of his work. Though, perhaps what stands out most is his ability to achieve this through his employment of traditional poetic modes. Harrison is resolute in his reasons for 'occupying' these conventional forms, not least iambic pentameter, considered by him hegemonic in that its use is one of the instruments of discrimination between proper poetics and the improper.

(Harrison 'Them & [Uz]', 103). Consequently, his most prominent poems take place in well-executed classical styles, in which his subversive interests are articulated. These interests encompass displacement and alienation, allusions to region and lower-economic background, and comparison of sets of values articulable in the discourse of the dis-possessed poor. The inscription of these concerns onto hegemonic poetics, which he broadly understands as the preserve of the bourgeoisie, arguably serves to disrupt the narrative of mainstream poetry and reclaim for Harrison some of the colonized territory mentioned above. Akin to the understanding developed with respect to Braine's Lampton in Chapter 5, Harrison's intelligence and ability to adopt practices valued within a bourgeois framework appear to have won him a hard fought and prominent place amongst its recently canonized members. (Smith, 146) However, this place is, in many respects, contingent upon the marginalization of his subject matter and admission of his personal iconography to a 'fixed' sub-category of 'working-class poetry'. His inclusion can thus be read as an aspect of bourgeois fetishisation of lower-class masculine performance, rather than acceptance in the field of poetry at large, reinforcing the systemic ideology observed by Roberts, and situating his 'classed' identity in the middle-class gaze more broadly.

The knowingness with which Harrison attempts to straddle the gap between his background and a British poetry firmly established within a particular culture of values is taken on by Peter Reading. The distance his work creates between 'the poet' and his subject matter, that is, Reading himself and the nastiness of class conflict that he often observes, positions the latter as an aestheticized vehicle through which he can present his 'junk' world to the reader (Corcoran 255). The biting humour of his work – also displayed in classical forms – provides the poet with space to operate at a slight remove from the material realities of the many lower-class antagonisms he articulates (Roberts 221). These are generally presented in mediated, distancing modes (quotations from other media, such as newspapers, voices of working-class women), and this two-dimensionalised backdrop, in turn, might be said to offer the poet a three-dimensional, (socially mobile) transitory presence, ostensibly enabling Reading to stand out as a particularly informed

individual, in possession of the right kinds of capital to move between classes, rather than occupy one position or the other. Much of the time, he appears to humorously 'own' the manner in which he performs. Consequently, this can be seen as adding a further knowing and ironic detachment which attempts to disown, akin to Billy Fisher, the actual experience of the class he is often thought to represent, executing instead a type of reportage for the middle-class gaze. Demonstrated here are two forms of engagement with and responses to a system of bourgeois distinction, which asserts the authority of certain performances of expertise and taste as the prominent way with which identity can be engaged through the practice of poetry. By subscribing to this both poets win conditional access to valuable forms of recognition within this established field. The challenge mounted by Harrison is absorbed in part by the manner in which it adheres to existing dispositions of expression, exposing an ability acceptable to the bourgeois order. Therefore, he is permitted conditional entrance to this existing order, which simultaneously fetishizes his niche position carved by his iconography of 'class-based' concerns. Reading's ostensive socio-cultural transience gained through ironic distance serves to aestheticize his cultural knowledge and politics, articulating a disavowal of the overt class conflict by which it is funded. However, its dependence upon the artifacts of the lower-classes restrains the degree to which the poet can truly be seen as separate. Both performances of these poets eventually engender a particular poetry, contingent upon its engagement with themes and cultural products overtly linked to the 'working-class' in a similar reductive, characterizing manner observed in the mechanisms of bourgeois narrative above. The emphasis placed on aspects of background, regional accent, politics of violence, sex and conflict, by which these men have come to be 'known', stresses an inextricable link between their careers as poets and this marginalized subject matter. This works in turn to fix the identities of these individuals to the 'working class' as regards their relationship to the bourgeois field of poetry, at once including them and maintaining a distance between them as 'poets of class', in the arena of 'proper' poets.

My position throughout this thesis has been that literary representations of lower-class masculinity respond to the bourgeois system of distinction by one of two routes: an attempt (with varying degrees of success) to comply with its values and thus ascend the social ladder, or to seemingly reject said values, adopting behaviour in direct opposition, and in doing so risking further alienation from the normative culture. The first of these two routes can arguably be seen in the poets immediately above, both having found a place – albeit, under the sub-category of 'Working Class poetry', within the established (bourgeois) understanding of mainstream literature. The latter route is perhaps best exemplified by the visceral, Mancunian poet, John Cooper Clarke. Despite being one of the most iconic and recognisably classed figures in British literature (performing to sold out crowds, headlining stages across the country and appearing on TV shows), Clarke is consistently and conspicuously absent in any mainstream map of British Poetry's present and recent past (*Beyond the* Lyric; *Identity Parade*; *New British Poetry*). Akin to Harrison, Clarke is often overtly contentious in his concerns of conflict ('Evidently Chickentown', 'Beasley Street') and he exhibits throughout his work much of the brutalizing intellect and wit found in Reading. However, having grown up outside of a cultural system which affords access to classical (bourgeois) poetics and canonized knowledge, Clarke has opted for a rejection of the normalised aesthetic lines (mentioned above) from which he is himself excluded, instead inventing his own style of delivery and exploring new terrains outside established areas (*Evidently …John Cooper Clarke*). Irrespective of the popularity this has provided, and in line with previous behavioural patterns observed in Welsh and King, his rebellion against conventional channels, has seen him disqualified as a participant from the field of 'poetry', in this case through the label of the pejorative term 'Punk' or 'Performance' poet. [25] The cleft in the reception of the poetics in which class concerns are displayed in Harrison and Reading, and Clarke reveals itself to be distinctly symptomatic of the wider practices observed above, consistent with the discourse of (self-)

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[25] Perhaps the clearest example of this is the qualification of his collection, published by Vintage Classics, by the term 'Poetry/Punk' which appears to have been invented explicitly for him, and by the epitaph on its cover: 'The Godfather of British Performance poetry.'

aestheticization, noted in Bourdieu, Skeggs et el, which attributes higher cultural capital to particular practices through a symbolic language system, allowing individuals possessive of these qualities to stand out as persons of value in a particular field. This is the case for Harrison and Reading to an extent, who have subscribed through deference to classical modes of poetry to the established order. Clarke, on the other hand, notwithstanding his articulation of very similar concerns in his work, falls outside of the language of these practices and is thus unintelligible; understood in only derogatory terms, he is not allowed to be known as a poet, nor a 'working class poet' within poetry's mainstream culture.

An interesting culmination of these three strands is found in contemporary poetry, in an examination of the trajectory of Don Paterson – who arguably embodies the establishment in this current British field (Pollard 148). Paterson's path has been well documented: from the humble lower-class beginnings where he observed the aforementioned Harrison reading on TV to the multi prize-winning poet and editor of mainstream publishing house Picador (A. E. Stallings). Paterson first established himself in the same vein as 'working class' poets, such as Harrison, mastering traditional forms elevated within institutionalised poetics to articulate his broadly class-based masculine iconography, expressed in laddish allusions to drink and football (Rosie Schaap), and sex (Justin Quinn). The manner in which he executed such an understanding of dominant forms, garnered praise from many of the male mainstream heroes of the British poetry world, and also gained him an elevated position within this order (Wroe). In 1994, he was one of the 'cool' new twenty poets named by the Poetry Book Society in its marketing campaign as a Next Generation Poet. The trajectory of this campaign, with its emphasis on rebranding poetry, can be read as somewhat mirroring the way Paterson's own career has developed: 'dressed in Paul Smith Ski Pants' the "choreographed" set of poets gazed into the lens of *Vogue*, to convey the message that "poetry was no longer the preserve of middle-aged Oxbridge men." It was *funky*. It was *edgy*.

It was […] hailed as the new rock n roll' (C. Patterson).[26] Twenty years on, many of those 'edgy' young poets have gone on to take their place within the pre-existing established order, with the power to make or break careers. Many younger poets now describe these individuals as gatekeepers of their own particular brands of poetics and the monopoly of these brands over the mainstream (Hamilton 2013, McDevitt). Paterson now wryly winces at the former 'working class' nature of his practice, detaching himself from it – perhaps as Lampton had previously, and declaring his interest in this mode of expression and identity had 'run its course' (C. Patterson). Through exercising a similar strand of political poetics as Harrison, Paterson gained entrance to the valorized mainstream in the same fetishised fashion as the former. Though, once inside, he was able to free himself from this marginalization. By making his new project the practices firmly valued within bourgeois understanding – such as translating classics (*Orpheus, after Rilke* 2006), focusing his work on the elemental and elegiac (*Rain* 2009), and most recently, producing an entire book dedicated to the traditionally valorized sonnet (40 Sonnets 2015), he fully positions himself within its discursive language, distancing himself from 'classed' poetry and its subject matter. His current employment, position and power stands testament to the strength of the existing language of aesthetics, maintaining and reproducing its particular codes of 'proper' poetics.

Having examined the work and career trajectories of these poets in order to understand the manner in which class conflict and identity have recently taken place in the arena of British poetry, it appears that, while each performance may exhibit a measure of success in its individual terms, more broadly, patterned masculine responses to the hegemonic bourgeois value system, prevalent throughout this thesis, are replicated through avenues similar to those demarcated earlier. One avenue seeks to engage said system, effectively performing to different extents its principles and therefore partially winning access to its social privilege and prestige; the other

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[26] It is perhaps interesting to note that this 'rock n roll' fashioning took place firmly within the established arena of bourgeois publishing and promotion, a far cry from the actual rock n roll/ punk/ post punk venues at which John Cooper Clarke performed his work

rejects this system by which it is excluded, attempting to create a localised framework through which a type of success can be achieved. Both of these can be seen as subject to the middle-class gaze examined above: the former adopting and attempting to operate politically within its perimeters – conceding its ('classed') subject matter to its codifying standards; the latter judged as unintelligible, as outside its language. Moreover, both of these avenues result in males of lower class heritage being fixed to specificities of 'class' and therefore contained and, to different extents, othered by the narrative of the bourgeois symbolic order. The example of Don Paterson's career – funded by a poetics of classed identity which was then rejected – articulates a further understanding of this, positing that the only way to fully become a 'proper poet' is to detach oneself from classed iconography, forsaking this subject matter for demonstrations of cultural and aestheticized knowledge. However, throughout the process of this thesis, I have come to realize this is not necessarily the case. Along with Raymond Williams I understand that there are no fixed identity groups, only ways of grouping individuals together to understand them in this fashion (Williams 300), which, in this case, serves to stabilize and preserve distinctions between one particular (privileged) group of poets and its 'other'. Thus, my investigation of critical humanist readings, with respect to how lived experience and identity may be represented, becomes more pertinent than expected in my decision to engage with this particular field. The shift in the manner in which I now perceive I am able to represent myself, alongside a consideration of the instability of the Subject, extends its challenge of a fractured composition of self to the ways in which the bourgeois symbolic economy manifests in British poetry, positing that it is not necessary to take the reductive form of one of the aforementioned camps above or the other, or to take on a particular range of 'classed' subject matter or seek to place oneself outside of the 'working class' subjecthood altogether. Instead, in contrast to what has been observed in the trajectories of the poets above, and in the protagonists of each novel examined, I can employ the multiple and fractured narratives available in a collection of poetry to reject the flawed class(ifying) framework, its conceptualisations and the limited options it imposes upon me. In exploring my subjectivity

through various angles of presentation (thirty-six angles in thirty-six poems), I am free to present my engagement as a social agent moving within a capitalist bourgeois discourse in different periods of time. Without the need to subscribe to conventions which situate me as one fixed unchanging self or another, I am permitted throughout this collection of poems to embody the multiplicity of voices and dispositions with which I have come to identify as part of my transitory experience. This may take place within or outside of particular coded poetic forms in respective poems; may display in one a 'sophisticated and cultural' knowledge to which I have had access; in another, speak about the violence of my past, demonstrate an attitude to sex and then say the opposite, or articulate through the voice of a squirrel a fear and anxiety of life in inner city London. The point is, all of these competing narratives in someway represent my reality, and in this way offer the opportunity to destabilize the concept of a fixed, coherent and 'working-class' subject and its presumed iconography, presenting in its place the shifting sense of identity which has come to characterise my experience of being educated within institutions sanctioned by the bourgeoisie, whilst remaining rooted in the socio-economic group into which I was born. By entering into these particular dynamics of the arena of poetry, my narrative 'I': a white male poet from a lower-class background, who has extensively theorized the intersecting discourses of class and masculinity, exists to problematize the social polarization, classification and valuing forms of distinction expressed in the discourse of the middle-class symbolic economy, found at large in poetry and much of the literature investigated above. In academic terms, what I have come to understand about myself as a social subject/agent is then able to be projected creatively, alongside the academic delineation of the ideas by which this understanding takes place; these two elements culminating in an informed political decision to present the representation of myself in my Ph.D; its very presence, as a site of political conflict and agency, becoming overt in the authorial voice, and thus suggesting one new avenue for future exploration of working-class masculinity in literature.

In relation to the academic analysis of representations of working-class masculinity, this chapter has outlined the process through which a creative practice diverging from my original intention has been developed. Through engagement with the socio-symbolic discourses delineated in the body of Part One, the exploration of problematic conventions in my previous attempt to re-configure the working-class literary protagonist have been presented. In turn, these have been employed to frame questions regarding the adequacy of the mainstream novel for the expression of class conflict. Drawing upon readings given by theorists of critical humanism, these contentions were further examined, and grounds for other means of creative expression were defined. With respect to the need to destabilize the ideological presentation of the subject (the narrative 'I'), as immovable and fixed, grounds for the move from an extended work of fiction to a collection of poetry have been established, defining the challenge this move presents to the recent discursive context in this field. What follows, then, is a collection of poetry written alongside my theoretical project, manifesting a variety of subject matter, but ultimately embodying my own subjectivity in its expression of different themes, and implicitly making me a figure in the canon of representation of the working-class male.

If I'm Ever to Find These Trees Meaningful I Must Have You by the Thighs

A Collection of Poetry

Mods

On slender blue scooters they come, singing,

> *There's love and disaster*
> *Moving where our minds are at.*

Sometimes they add a little *bah-ba-ba-ba-ba-la* in parenthesis.
Sometimes not. There has never been a more perfect set
of haircuts. Never before a less impressive set
of gangsters, careful-stepping *À bout de souffle.*
Flick knives and pill heads are so beautiful in this context.

The greatest mod I ever met was a man called Denzil. In his mind
he figured himself a poet. He washed dishes in a hotel backroom,
and his hair every Thursday. He wore his cuffs symmetrically rolled.
The best mods are alive in metaphors, walk in West End narratives,
and shebeens, and do violence with greasy bags of chips.

> All day, actual poets,

like school kids, dream about sex, and sit about cafés
dunking soldiers in egg yolk, sometimes they write things down.
Occasionally, they dream of a city overrun by singing mods,
get distracted and end up humming.

A girl with a café au lait in a film once said that poetry
is a way of inhabiting the world that you want.
She said it better than that.

Cutting a Figure

Begin by losing yourself.
Burn your old clothes, your love notes.
Sit naked at your midnight window,
weighing the cadence of the age.

Become a flicker behind the blue smoke
of dive bars. Decipher conversations,
eavesdrop on topics that hold attention:
plot the growth of future trends.

Memorize turns of phrase
and adapt their use for other circles.
Survey the movement of masters;
scrutinize your artful ancestors –

Brummel, Langtry – trace and retrace
their images. Mimic the mannerisms
of success, as the apprentice does
before he attempts an autonomous stroke.

Etch an outline of your ideal.
Let it hold you accountable.
Feign authenticity, be well versed
in the art of telling a lie. Examine

the parameters of social acceptance;
be scandalous within. Allow yourself
to be held but not bridled.
Perhaps then you will be ready to emerge

in society, to court the light, to have
your features captured in photographs,
your exploits noted in memoirs
you'll one day strike a match to.
(First Published in *Beloved, in case you've been wondering*. London: Donut Press. 2011)

On a Lame Pigeon
After Agathias

No longer, soft pigeon,

meted to within

one inch

of the dark's erratic grin –

by the right-foot volley

of the muscular

and capricious Gavin –

do you,

within your small cathedral

of body, sing;

nor take,

in your stride of pigeon-ness,

these living woods,

your lawful place;

you are meat now,

      food for that foot.

We both know,

tossed as you are

for a second time

by the steady hand

of Peggler,

      your head's already off.

But know the rest of you

my undeveloped self

is primed to tackle from them

and – with weeping
and with reverence –

stuff into the side pocket
of my brand new
Reebok satchel.

Imagine a Park
After W. S. Graham

Imagine a park. A real park. Its fringed innards.
Now see through its climbing web,
its swings, see over its see-saw. The grass,

you'll note, past the wood-chipping,
is an almost inaudible blue. The air is rushing
to get in on itself; the bickering trees, bickering.

Ask: What's it like when no kids are here?
You'll know, because no kids are here.
Except, suddenly, you are wearing

that zipped-up hoodie you always do,
and there's Gav, Jonny, Peggler is passing you
a Tesco bag. Look: immediately inside:

a full pot of Weldwood fast-drying glue,
fresh from his step dad's tool shed.
Stick your head in and sniff. Feels mental, doesn't it?

Exhale. Your own grin is a set of fanned-out knives.
Now pick your own thing to think on too. You can't:
I've got you behind my childhood eyes.

It's white bread you're picturing, isn't it, sliced,
or the wind tunnel of a teacher's dress, some thighs,
policemen, a feeling of sickness, love bites,

or the walloping raw hand of my father
coming down on you like the sky.

Some Waynes

Magic Wayne with flowers; Wanye West; Box-of-Tricks Wayne; Wayne sad on Facebook, proving he loves his daughter; the sporty Wayne – loves himself skinny; Bald Wayne, head like a rocking chair; Amy Waynehouse; A-Parody-of-Himself Wayne; Wayne the ironic; Fat Wayne – tits pushed beneath a Fred Perry Wayne; Wayne from Swindon; Ugly Wayne – the unlikely mess of his wife Wayne – canned laughter; Wayne from near Slough; Wayne who renamed another Wayne fleabag; Track-suited Wayne – your hubcaps, his pockets; Home and A-Wayne; Randy Wayne; Wayne, fountains of him, every drop snug to someone's mum; Wayne: trucker cap-wearer; Wayne, boyfriend of Stacey; Wayne-ker; Wayne the rap star, gold teeth, grime; Wayne the Superhero Wayne the Cowboy; Dancing Wayne – homosexual in tights; It's-Wayning-Men; a cavalcade of Waynes fucking each other up in a Geoff Hattersley poem – in a pub, in Barnsley; Purple Wayne; Wayne's World Wayne, Wayne 'Sleng Teng' Smith; A Wayne in a Manger; Wayne the dentist's nightmare; Wayne the Eastender: all of them have stopped what they're doing, all of them divided in two rows and facing each other, all of them, arms raised, they are linking fingers, all of them: an architrave through which I celebrate, marching like I am the bridegroom, grinning like I am the bride

Liebling, when first you came to me, I tell you

I was like both nuns in that tale, who trembled beneath
a black umbrella at the powdered orange moon
cuffed upon the chapel's crown, the skies pinned back
into their deep black selves by slanted rain;

both nuns who quaked when, from behind a tree,
the wet Rabbi began to move toward the sheathed sanctuary
of that same umbrella – the heave of his articulate cock
denuding the pair of them in their unspoken dark.

Both nuns: the one who ran, who wept like a skeleton
across the church lawn; the other, who remained –
her upright soul, it's said, you could almost see fold
as if bending, as if sprawling itself over a balloon-backed chair,

while some old pert lips purred raspberries up and through her,
the strange beauty of it slowly risen in her eyes.

Coco Lachaille

The back of her hand placates my cheek:
'It's just an act! Are you ok?' Before I reply
she's gone and the hostess announces
 'Miss …   Coco …   Lachaille!'

She enters, stage left, Charlestons clumsily.
A glut of men watches as she struts
a playful *rubato*, cha-cha kicks, twirls a parasol
like a walking stick, 'til oops! she stumbles

aesthetically, throws a candid glance, blows
bubbles with a slim black pipe. I try
to reconcile this with last night's *tendresse*,
but now her hair is candyfloss pink, folded beneath

a feathered head dress. I stare at her painted face:
white, her blue-rimmed eyes, a single red line
tracing the length of her cheek. I'm fixed
on her lips as she flashes a smile, winks on a beat,

bends to reveal a glimpse of what they came for,
teases the crowd forward in their seats. *Accelerando*!
Now the swirls throw up her petticoat's tulle tiers;
she spreads the polka-dot parasol, snaps it shut

on the splash of a cymbal. *What applause!*
Her velvet corset's disappeared along with the pipe,
replaced by finger to lips, broderie anglaise pantaloons.
She spins and cocks her foot: *Fin*.

The parasol reopens, she drops into splits.
(First Published in *Beloved, in case you've been wondering*, London: Donut Press 2011)

Hyperreality

A view of things squared by TV;
the collapse of soap scenes, compelled
by *that* music: one note held
long enough for a sense of dread
to build, followed by death, a burst
vessel in a young boy's head, or the news
I'm afraid she'll never dance again.

Those warning notes always pursue and snatch
the addict almost overcoming his vice,
the young couple subverting their struggle.
As I lay beside her that night, a guitar fell
in the room across the stairs and I froze,
unsure if I should have given up smoking.

Self Portrait #1

Three cigarette butts, a half-pile of books, an open Coke can tipped –
as if the yellow field spilled out of it and over everything:
the conversation of squirrels, the nine or ten trees, then
drenched the redhead in fishnet purple being blown back
by the low slung, half-moved sky.

Thirty Minutes of Havana for Only Fifteen Cents

Have you heard the one about Julius?
After a show he climbs inside his dressing gown,
sets his alarm clock to guffaw in half an hour,
puts his feet up and settles down on the hotel bed.

Chuffing a cigar, a heady texture, nutty aroma,
he pulls easy, satisfied. Chews over the name Groucho.
Enjoys it, *Groucho*. Strokes his sprouting upper-lip fluff,
savours his future. Shoots a look at the clock, fifteen minutes.

The cigar is waning. He tries to relax, closes his eyes
but hears the seconds tick. The brown skin is receding fast.
He's tense. His eyes flick, twenty-one minutes gone.
In another it's dead, a soggy mix of spit and shreds.

As soon as morning cracks he's spilling the butt
on the store counter and the clerks face is saying
What? They haggle the difference of eight minutes,
then cut a deal: another cigar.

Back in that flea-bitten room he winds up his timepiece,
hangs back and smokes, practises a few expressions.
For eighteen minutes, pictures lights flashing *Marx Bros*,
then he's holding the quick of it in his hand.

He takes a pen and writes a stiff letter
and three weeks later, gets a cheque
from La Preferencia Cigar – fifteen cents.
And here's the kicker: he cashes it and buys another.

This Glass Bottle Empty of Milk

This glass bottle empty of milk holds an old railway town mapped with a crossword of streets, marked with Brian's butcher shop, the steel works, Anne's bakery, the women in hair-nets, their doorway mutter sliced like rashers of bacon or pounds of beef, with the lighting of cigarettes.

The air is fixed with the smell of baked cheese that forks down the road, past the man on the cycle that squeaks with each push of a pedal and through a small open window where a boy drinks the blue glow of TV like the cat from the house on the corner drinks the music of the milk float.

The cat stands and shivers as the float shifts like a love song snug in the throat of a housewife whose knees blush beneath her pink skirt. The sky is grey, smudged by smoke, black like noses of hopscotching children stopped, one foot in a yellow-chalked box, next to street lamps that redden

like the wife's face slapped by the man of the house whose neck hairs are ruffled by the tangle of bed clothes that dropped off the bed as an eight- year-old's tears drop and are lost in the orange-brown swirls of a carpet, but never forgotten, like this glass bottle and its old railway town.

Carry On, Doctor

but something moves inside me,
i feel it – light and true to life
as that which swells within my wife's
translucent belly – a glowering skein,

a moon of sorts, some minute thing,
pulsed by the dark Saturn
of my own being; its dreamt thoughts
the heft of as yet undone labour.

It moves, too exacted thus to speak,
though sires itself – each rib knocked, each
finger pressed to my encumbered liver.
Laugh, Doctor, carry on, with those

Oh-so-trim and grinning mid-wives
Lined at my white-gowned bedside.
But know my every wince boasts
a stolen advent – it's pressing further

to my swelling bank. When it bursts
it will punch us right in the ghost.

(First Published in *Beloved, in case you've been wondering*. London: Donut Press. 2011)

When the apples bulged on the branches of the garden tree

(she leaned her cheeks over the waxed table, polished the fruit bowl and waited

as her lover grew full behind her with his soldier's grin – his cap stiff as his regalia

was that night the bugle posted and she dusted his epaulettes, pinched the black edges

of his moustache, cracked open the brass knuckles of his shirt and they celebrated,

lifting together her floral nightie and her soft body atop the well-waxed table, the meat

of her squeezed tight against his crumpled trousers, his good hand aquiver, and O

the whistle of his hard breath through the gap in his front teeth made her sing

to herself, *All will be well and all will be well and all manner of things will be well,*

while her eyes drifted back to the window and she saw the sky shake over the branches of the

garden tree and two apples falter as he moved brisk inside her and brisker still, nudging the table,

slapping its top when he spent himself wholly and half-said her name – and she considered

explicit that moment when), one of them fell.

Beloved, in case you've been wondering,

that old man so adamant that he take our picture
on our first date (as we queued outside the Fiddler),
he with his white eyebrows and moustache,
timeless as a clown behind the bulb's flash,

the same one we swore was on stage a Live 8,
craning that big lens our way, between Elton John's legs
and his piano stool, proud as a drunk colonel

and who stuck his head out from a whale's mouth
as we ate 99s on a wooden bench by the Thames,

he's not lost to us; I saw him on the 176,
gaunt and languid, eyes shut, hugging his camera
as he slept. When I read your text: *I'll forgive you, but not yet*
something flashed across his face. I saw his finger flicker.

And Then There Was Max Wall

Taking a turn round the park, mindful of the remark that
Round these parts, the smaller the dog is, the queerer the man,
and, dachshund tugging at the lead in his hand, he recalls
a song that – all of a sudden – he once should have written:
'The Smaller The Dog, Sirs, The Queerer The Man'.
That one would've gone down better than some of the queens
on his old circuit. The Professor inside him (the beast)
knocks twice: bad joke. Max ignores him and turns to the dog.
He watches its waddle, enjoys the inherent off-beat comedy of it.
He sees in his mind a procession of dachshunds, each one biting
the tail of he that precedes, thinks *Would this dog, if cut*
lengthways, reveal the same intrusive Prof who owns me?
Or would there be a tinier version of its own dog-ego
ready to spring out – its four legs an anti-clockwise twitch
in an otherwise tickety-tock act, a tightening on his dog life's hamstring?
And if so, isn't that just like some of the women I've loved
and unloved, and then, surreptitiously, loved again?
He pictures a procession of dogs as marching mistakes.
He pictures a procession of dogs in wedding gowns –
their stumpy legs synchronised – each with a different woman's face.
He must, for a while at least, suppress the Professor.
But how? The latter now is too big an ego to alter.
The dog, or the dog inside the dog, or perhaps the Professor
himself, coughs: it sounds like *Fuck-it*, which Max mistakes for *Beckett*.

Self Portrait #2

A moon

& two chairs, broken

& a half-glass of milk

& a small red candle in a small red bowl

& two untouched spoons before a tall lattice window

& a poster of a square-fringed girl with a smirk and paddle

& a corner of a room with a square-fringed girl, a smirk and a paddle

& and me an old man spanked

Next to no light flickered on him.

Did I tell you I carried myself around like a full bladder

or a poet   to get to the street   perhaps I shouldn't

mention this   or dog bits   pieces of the broken

poodle I am – tight curls and each   rib and paw

and my barking snout –   to get where   into my whet eye

hurried the unbusy street   and my keen whetted eye

unfastened the image of your body from the unbusy street

and your body from its image   and the trousers on your body

and the trousers matched my   own trousers

and I knew before I knew   you   our   bottom halves

were squared forever   and from where I   like a full dog

ran   perhaps I shouldn't mention   with myself

through all of the moments up to this moment, in this room,

where my trousers are the same trousers as your trousers

and our trousers – squared   despite my dog-self –

are the same indistinguishable pattern   as the bed you arc upon

here   and here I am writing you a poem   perhaps I

shouldn't mention   that in my half of our trousers

I'm writing you a poem six point two inches in length, one point

two inches thick

and growing: as

I watch you sat

on the bed,

indistinguishable

from the bed, in

your half of our

indistinguishable

trousers, I want

to do with you what

the tailor does with

good fabric, what

the large bone does

with a small dog

(First published in *Stop Sharpening Your Knives 5*. ed. Sam Riviere, Emily Berry et al. Norwich: Eggbox Publishing. 2013)

Interview with Smith Wigglesworth

Smith's seen the world from the inside of churches. He dresses
with pride, cheeks full of stories: the Salvation Tour of Sweden,
healing cancer and ulcers with a series of punches; God's tongue in
his mouth speaking conviction to the hangman and simpleton, his
own faith increasing as his ailments receded. The Lord's been kind
to him, he's no regrets; except he had no time for jazz, to dance
with his wife, he'd like to have tried out the music halls; couldn't
help but recite a few of those ditties they sang in the street – even
thought up one of his own. Recently, he's been reading *The Great
Gatsby*, *Billy the Kid* – adventures outside the whisper of Christ –
thinking that there might be something he's missed. He says he
struggles not to feel out of his depth, *like Noah*. He never smoked,
still doesn't, or drank, I repent of that now, he smirks, swirling his
bitter. Stay for one more? An old man limps over, trouser leg rolled
above a black swollen knee: 'Please help.' See, Smith sighs,
pushing back his chair, rolling his eyes, *Some people get rained on
wherever they go, others have been drowning all their lives*.

(First Published in *Beloved, in case you've been wondering*. London: Donut Press. 2011)

Valentine's Day, 1919

'my heart is perched on nothing's branch'

– Attila József, 'Without Hope' (translated by George Szirtes)

Undone at an early age, and poor, he hugged the tree.

Or rather, he threw his arms right out and pushed his heart

toward its bark-bound and awkward body.

The villagers who saw, or heard from those who saw,

declaimed at once 'an unnatural love'; others, an unhealthy

hibition, – at best, a folly. Clerics clucked,

mustachioed men and small girls laughed, though

chief of despondences was the tree itself. The singular way

it was unwavered by his swelling and wholly clean intention.

But who in his correctly-twigged mind could fault,

he thought, the actions which brought close the counter-

point to one's own leaf-canopied heart? He knew that,

for the time being, his only torts would be

the tree he felt spring up through his spent heart,

and the flick-book of unvarnished rage that would dance

him to the edge of his otherwise brinked body, such was

the unformulaic rejection to which he'd been victim.

Rejection, an inverted affection. Affection,

his brand new old enemy. He could not help but picture a heart,

external but recognisably his own, contracted

in the empty branches of that tree. Its fault: it looked seven types of alive.

(First published in *Inspired by Hungarian Poetry British Poets in Conversation with*
Attila Jozsef ed George Szirtes. ISSU.com.*)*

Poem Two

Coco sits, dressed in her unsponsored freedom,
counting all the beautiful things about herself.
Her hairless and oval knees, for one, unfurl
whiter than the whitest rose buds unfurl

at the bend of my eye. We all have known her delineation:
she is everyone's Mariana; anyone's Fancy; she is able
to both wear the magic girdle, and remove it. Way back,
she began her metonymic unbuttoning of weaker men:

masculinities with beards on their groins alone, and suicides;
it is possible she named first the apple, first the mistress
and raven as each balding man sang her. She is covered
in ravens and glitter and names first: me, even in my own throat.

Her freedom is ravens; she's counts out the raven hymns
a cavalcade of men sang with dead erections, since before
she was Eve. If I could detach my hand, I'd throw it
back across time and scare the dirty great lot of them.

(First published in Prague Revue – http://www.praguerevue.com/ViewArticle?articleId=810 2013)

Why

She knows you're thinking an April scummed with mud

and you stuck at something too-hard   and turned thin

at your worst   an April scummed with mud   she collared you there

dirty-heeled and Thomas plays violin thirty nights better

than you've ever slept   she knows   you're thinking

and also your shins   and she stays when you stuck at something

drenched in red hair   thirty nights too hard and kisses

turned thin   at your worst you walk better

than you've ever slept   in your shins   she knows

and dark dirty heeled   Thomas plays violin and through April

your teeth go too hard for her   your scummed shins

a straight thirty nights   bite themselves back and she's there

and then there   and wearing your shoes   and your shins and

how queer morning comes   drenched in blond hair   all eyes

and teeth that bite themselves back

I hope this will explain everything:

I was young. In fact, I was six when I saw my dad
hit my mum, hard in the face.
I was playing that game, *Buckaroo*. Nobody moved,

then the donkey kicked and I ran to my room.
I was so angry I made a gun with two fingers, a thumb,
and shot my cat square in the head.

Scamp didn't flinch, just licked his right paw
and winked. And none
of this counts, except the next day Scamp was dead.

Until the Sunday you slapped me, I'd forgotten.
Please understand, I wouldn't touch you those last weeks
for that reason, for your sake. I'm sorry.

Worship Music

Accept all happiness from me
E. E. Cummings

Tell her each time she marries him I don a scarecrow's hat,

some straw, a hole-pocked coat, and lance maniacal

across redundant fields. There are no crows, of course;

they crept away. Awry, they sport no need of me;

they are her cake-beaked wedding guests, sequin-eyed

and squawking rows of big band music, the favourites:

Frank, The Duke. But though their ungloved wings are clutched

through arms of in-laws, and everybody sings, tell her this –

that there are other birds; sparrows who, like me,

have no common song. They blink in trees,

then chirrup and squeak and coo and cry. Tell her:

each one a song unjoined by mate or mate's mate, but

as I bound they swim to me, one, then more,

like I might raise my voice again; another bird,

another, pitched upon my trunk, my throat, my lips.

A different note from all. I strut a marching-band of sparrows,

a single prayer of sorts, an instrument of benediction

to wedding songs, to random notes and other souls,

to open windows, lights left on, to empty homes.

A trumpet to the unsung, the void, the not yet known.

Poem in Which

She always leaves

a bacon sandwich on the kitchen table,

a message scribed in ketchup beneath its upper rung of bread.

In which I swallow whole the note and never know it's there.

I spell *I'm sorry* with sodden clothes, with smiling too long and flower stems,

on my mistakes, as they are happening, all of them.

Poem in which my mother is maddened, not disappointed.

Poem in which all my mothers are maddened: the old ladies

smoking at bus stops, scanning bacon and bread loaves at Tesco,

under flapping umbrellas in King's Cross and High Barnet. Poem in which

I forget my umbrella, am not a failure and my mothers,

all of them, are pretty and called Margaret.

      In which the rain spells their name on me

and dry patches of escarpment.

Discerning Grandfather

Oh Harold, is it true your eyes set loose a stream
of heart-shaped balloons and pink feathers
when you first saw her, that those balloons,
those feathers knit together to clothe her,

and when she wore that knitted gown, your wink
turned the balloons to sequins, found reflected
in each an image of a celebration feast for her
and seven bridesmaids? Say it is and, Harold,

say it was the barley and hops that misled you,
the barley, the hops which curled your fist.
That when you slept yourself clean of their curse,
in your sleep those sequins were glass bowls

filled with goldfish, each one mouthing a letter
of her name, in your sleep you found the given day
when those letters re-arranged themselves as vows,
and after those vows were spoken, you commanded

the balloons' and feathers' dispersal. Say it's true
that but for the hops, Harold, but for the barley, she'd
have forever been courted by balloons and pink feathers
and never would purple roses have clouded her eye.

Sympathy for Toast

Made from the bread of Brit tongue the seed of words the chanced combinations of curlicues or noises could mean 'brioche' as leif or 'mother' they might mean nothing but from where we are down here we need to understand ourselves and each other so acquiesce to conventions like 'sandwich' or 'toaster' are almost always beneficial to their inventors and it is factual to say that most toast is grateful to be told what it is what it isn't

Its loss of pungency its dried out freedom a loafed dialogy carved into meaning by the discourse of (we call them) 'knives' decide which ones will be cut thick enough to be gifted the 'yolk' has often been an arbitrary symbol for imprisonment or slavery and is also the want by which toast understands itself (and it gasps) when the saucepan is rumbling is sometimes described as the process through which treacheries are bared but the toast thinks only of the prospect of the soft embrace of sticky yellow sun

Bred from the oven its enchantment with constructions of heat and light science has many positive things to say but seldom any about 'butter' is synonymous with 'sycophancy' to lubricate metaphorically and to batter into agreement with kindness to beat dynamically downward something through buttering but toast has nothing save the properties it is made from and cannot barter only hope that its colouring will carry enough currency just light enough a kind of tanned white gold is best to be chosen cut further and eaten

Mid-tale, the maker of myths

died. And following that, all the men grew long
     their hair,
and many a moustache was a-twirled in regard to
     the frigid trees,
in regard to the clouds, stagnant and filled
     with sagged-out dark.
And the circus wheels and the phosphors couldn't,
and the jingles the piano players played
and the running of small boys with lighted candles
     couldn't lift
the nakedest of nightmares that lay prostrate,
that plagiarised themselves each night
on unmade pillows of the town.

Mid-tale, the maker of myths died. And the Nue,
     those hairy nightmares
spoken at the maker's death, froze on their branches
     and in the clouds
and in the plain men of the town with their
     bepuzzled stature.
All the pretty girls that filled the streets with tinsel
crowns, bracelets and small bronze bells couldn't,
and the cartwheeling, the juggling clowns couldn't
     ignite the minds
of those plain, plain men whose hair grew
and whose nails grew long as they twisted
their moustache ends and deeply thunk.

Mid-tale, the maker of myths died. And the town
     looked on
as the men grew long their hair but couldn't,
     as the twirled their
moustache ends and deeply thunk, they couldn't
     resolve the dead man's
mid-way tale. And lighting flared in the eyes

of the embarrassed Nue, who shrugged, apologetic

in the branches, or moped in clouds like Lotharios

      grown sad and old – eyes flitting

that way and this in their monkey heads. Their tails

lisped hushed *forgive me's* at the sleepers, as those

hapless bad dreams dripped down again and again.

Note:

Nue: Nightmare Chimera

In Japanese folklore the Nue – its head of a monkey, body of a racoon dog, limbs of a tiger, snake tail – is an elusive, cunning creature with strange powers. It's said that in 1153AD, Emperor Konoe was haunted by sickening night terrors, the source being a dark cloud over his palace. One night a guard fired an arrow into the cloud, out of which fell a dead Nue. Its body was tossed to the sea. Immediately the Emperor's night terrors ceased.

We can see, Coco and I, from inside this big nodding head,

Its smile like the stripes of a brand new deck chair,

the fur-collared, cigar smoking crowd. They're tearing up betting slips

that till now were kept in the bands of their trilbies,

after a cloud of coloured caps and hooves thundered by.

                                                 Rats!

The devil take her – this pink-hair paramour who hugs my waist,

whose bosom's sagging weight draws me back to her laugh,

who bids me forget myself.

        Now behind the floodlights, the cluster of curse words,

a winner's name is rattling from a speaker, and for a horse's breath

I'm outside of us again, watching three rosettes being pinned,

a cork being popped, a disco of bulbs flash and the pantomime

of us zipped in this long brown suit: as we conga the track

a shower of screwed up bets skip down like confetti.

(An earlier version of this poem first appeared in *Beloved, in case you've been wondering*. London: Donut Press. 2011)

Self Portrait #3

Take a photo and hold it fast
to yourself, that part the polaroid
only half-sees: your punctum.

An image cannot wholly develop,
unless it's caught between
yourself and the part of you it fakes.

Reasons Not to Brick a Squirrel

I have grown thin from the presence of the squirrel
who passes among the raked leaves on the square
of green in my garden, and over the table, prising
red candles from wine bottles. His paws cling
to the chipped paint of a windowsill, the street
lamp's glare amplifying his shadow while a TV
fills my room with the salience of a cocktail nation.
He taps the glass on the back door as I sleep and so disturbs
my vested self, the one from the wrong side of *Orange County*
but about to come good, and with my straight-toothed friends
around me, I might win at a computer game or kiss the girl.
When tonight I answer him, he heeds not the brick in my hand.
Instead, his eyes, they say:

           But I too dream of California, and I know
that you know nothing more than I know, which is nothing except
the nibbling of skin from the grapes of Napa Valley as the day bulges;
of a night spent swinging in a bar with a low-slung ceiling
to the music of Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, a spinning double bass,
a girl's whale-boned waist agreeing silently with your palm.
But, they say, mostly, *mostly I know that we two are the same;*
picking what we can from the chicken wing of South London.
The brick in my hand drops only when the cyclical pitch
of police cars ring out a laugh at the both of us.

(First Published in *Beloved, in case you've been wondering*. London: Donut Press. 2011)

Fezziwig's Christmas Overture

It is, I'm told, entirely plausible that to seem

is to be. So we must, dear lady wife, in this room

forged with cake and dancing, fogged with the night

and its milkman guests, its paperboys and cook,

and our opulent daughters, be happy, mustn't we?

                                  Your thumb,

after all, is inside my collar, my own at play

on your hip. Regardless of who we are, we are here,

more than compeer to any plumb pairing.

So though this be a quickening number, pray,

let us slow the fiddler's ephemeral noise

                        not to a halt but close,

and (with the shutters rolled up on our Yule Tide)

allow these seconds to become our lives.

What Happened Was This

The more she thought the more she thought not of their marriage/ not

of their wedding night/ but of the night before that night/ or at least

what he told of what he did that night and how he didn't/ this she

knew/ have a proper stag but/ this she didn't/ he and his friends

played a large game of tig in which he hid in a park from

his friends for what seemed like two years/ disguised

by the dark and a bush and no one/ not one/ could find him

and as it grew cold he ignored still their calls/ could hear/

found some kind of comfort in hearing/ their calls

so didn't reveal where has was and thought about sleep

and thought about sex but thought he might stay

there forever then he came/ all of a sudden/ to himself/

in one moment/ and sprang out of the bush into the light

of a street lamp/ and thought they'd all hidden

and thought they were playing a trick/ but then

he realised and then/ andthenandthen/ the kick

(First published in *Oxford Poetry XIV. 3*. ed. Aimie Williams, Lavinia Singer. Oxford. 2013)

When the itching became too great

I tilted and rapped my head good and hard with the heel of my hand.

Out they fell, bickering to the ground: an old knave with a hooked nose,

brogues, a cane; a woman with coiffed hair, an anchor tattoo, fat rolling pin.

Both wagged fingers. A tide of red leveled their faces. I covered my ears,

crossed my eyes. They drew an arsenal of cutlery from pockets and sleeves,

assailed each other and saw this ate into me. The man pulled a rose

from his flies and they laughed, did a little jig and walked arm in arm back along

my prone body. She roosted cross-legged on my nose. He held out m

y lower eye lid, gave a mannered sweep of the hand. She hitched up her skirt,

curtsied, jumped in. A bow tie, knickerbockers, a vest, flung out as I sneezed.

When I blinked I saw them copulate. When I wept, I wept babies.

(First Published in *Beloved, in case you've been wondering*. London: Donut Press. 2011)

The Moment Ye Old Axe Strip Club Turns Into A Rockabilly Disco
I want to see stretch marks and bruises from a strip club; that's real art. Tim Wells

Why not stay, Tim, as the pound-in-a-pint strip club door swings
to whip in those quiffs and duck's arses? The scene's the same:

barmaid's eyes, the way the reds of sofas pack heat – only tonight
Carl Perkins stirs it. So hang on the back barstool as they come

twisting in gangs, polka dots and Hawaiian shirts, tuck-turning.
Scan the stretches of walls, the mirrors, and think

of that Polish bird, Anouska, who hula-hooped your right thigh
hours back, now safely wrapped in her bedtime quilt.

Scratch your crotch. The frill-dressed girls are black cherry
and white from clitoris to hair pin, with a sniff of the young

well-mannered, the drunk. Raise a Black Russian to the boys
watching them re-apply lipstick, fists in their change pockets.

And toast the old bar hand snatching looks at one laughing prick
whose peach-cheeked girlfriend flings her leg round a pole.

(First Published in *Beloved, in case you've been wondering*. London: Donut Press. 2011)

In Camden or Camberwell

Mark then, Sophie, the physiognomy of this rosebush,
beneath its blanket beauty (like that of bruised butterflies),
and the way it wears the sky for a blue hat,
thinking that makes it like so many blackbirds.

                                        Oh-ho
(you may very well rub your hands) the ol' simulacrum machine's
paying out today. The squeak of my very own red boots
makes me feel like a tall version of a boy who listens to Morrissey.

And it's not unlike someone like you, you know,
this rosebush in its blue hat. Note how it shakes
and feels hurt when all the world withdraws
and the birds who best it sing inside it like an iPod,
grinning teeth hidden behind those lively white-blue knots.

Someone like you, all scarecrow's cock and unicorn,
is somewhere, smiling, in Camden or Camberwell – like a coat hanger,
trying on so much of this London (gawping as the rosebush at blackbirds),
about to bite and taste nothing.

(First Published in *Beloved, in case you've been wondering*. London: Donut Press. 2011)

That Year the Seagulls Exploded

across the air-waves   Chat show hosts in ties   their wings open
        like massive Sainsbury's bags   a shrill eye able to see the worst in everyone
 their beaks full of corrective love on every channel they were so polyphyletic
        in their embrace of the mis-sharpened souls   oddballs with calamitous grills
        and us the devoting public we cared right back at them

Though they weren't *actual* doctors   they could dislodge
        with an easy grin   the truth from anything
they were always right and we agreed hard with them through our televisions:
        that man in a too-tight vest *was* a pervert we could see it in his nipple ring;
the big woman with those tattoos wouldn't get her man's respect or any man

There was an apocalypse of normality every day of the week
        grafted on the angling head of each great bird   one finely tuned line
ripping the just desserts straight from a heart of the wrong'un
        and with poise   held out for us to eat on
they could have saved us those gulls from the rest of what we were thinking

Simple Mathematics

He is centre in a bunch of aging women:
each of his sixteen full years weighed
by the famished, mumsying-love of them.

He is certain he won't tell his father
that he is learning simple mathematics,
that one pound = approx. three thousand calories.

Across town, his mates Peggler and Gavin are
fingering their girlfriends at the same bus stop.
Here: the loose-skinned kindness of Shirley,

a table of low-fat chocolate bars, scales,
new and exciting recipes, the accumulation
of ProPoints® on his own personalized plan.

The Trail of the Lonesome Pine

The dirty great day throws at Miss Stein
the contemporary pine-wood; she wanders,
her tight-bunned head and brain, her tasty

and, nowadays, niggled fondness of things.
She wanders, between trees – cracked
by dawn, roof-topped by broken sun.

Something's on at her. Again: that song,
it bloats up in her, almost over-reaching her lips.
She likes these strolls, but *that* song. She sucks

on it hard. Sucks it in and swallows. She thinks
– but this is not her subject – the sun.
The trees, the day, these, through which she wanders,

are not her subjects. Here is a brief introduction
to her subjects: just Alice, her sidekick.
The tree in the song on her lips comes to life in an instant.

The day for an instant falls wide open. But alas,
it follows, she blinks to not see it: a daydream
in black and white; past the trees, the sun, it follows:

the scene, a film on the picture house's big screen:
its unlikely pairing, their names? Laurel and Hardy,
bowler-hatted. Someplace in a sawdust bar

a cowboy's crooning. Backbones stirred, lips open,
they join him, the larger man first, then his friend
with the starched face. A silly thing, she thinks:

one fat, one slim, they merge so you can't see the skinny

outside of the other one's waist. Her stomach cows:

she has herself now bow-tied and 'tached;

Alice, bending knees, in a bowler hat, stepping out, growing bolder.

Miss Stein wringing her dicky, a cringe wound tight

round her spine, as Alice pronounces a note an octave higher.

On rich velvet seats, she sees it, the worlds of France,

the States are stunned to witness Alice's round eyes,

Miss Stein's face like a pickled onion, getting bitter, getting more bitter.

Wait, then it comes: a twitching moustache, as on screen,

a balled palm on the screen of her mind, coming down

    like the comedy of love felt too strong.

If I'm Ever to Find These Trees Meaningful I Must Have You by the Thighs

Something kind of like this: yes – a farmer with a pipe. No – it began with a village asking why. It began with an old man. It began with a village asking why it was – for the sake of an old man, his ruined heart, his view of things assembled like smashed stained glass, the portraits of wives who'd slighted him. He had a grey beard, I see it, and a limp. The broken teeth of the morning always at his neck, but nevertheless rich. He was a rich man. And this plot of land was his, handed down to him.

We'll start with him staring, sitting back on his land's nape and staring as the broke-toothed morning breathed. Staring and thinking [   ]. And this thought he stored, as he cradled these spines, these sapling yews. He stabbed one in the ground, the next, and again into the perimeter of this, his land and made it square. The village looked on, asked why it was. You wouldn't know this. He did this. And coughing with each stab he knew he'd soon be gone and with no sons. So he handpicked seven 'Men of Trust'. Coughing, he told them *No drunk may stain, no child yak, no dog may sour this place*.

The trusted men repaid his faith. They shone lamps through each dawn's broken teeth into the nooks of this, his square, and kept it safe. And these trees did grow. These trees did grow, they all joined hands and fog did swell and paint the grass. And the old man died. The village looked on asking why it was. The village danced in memory of him, held a fete each year to celebrate his wealth, his tragic life, his fate. This isn't it, though. There was the fire. You wouldn't know. The fire that nearly licked right through the square, but the village danced, it danced and stomped the flames out with its muddied soles. And then rejoiced. It felt saved. This isn't it, though.

The field was sectioned, cordoned off for seasons. The fete had whittled to a glass raised in a public house by those who knew. You wouldn't know. There were people, boys and girls, who never looked upon the outskirts of what we do now. Seasons. Then a wedding. Permission from a son of a son of a 'man of trust's' son. The trees held firm, held hands, the village danced and sang a song. *This is it!* they sang, *this is the reason/ the reason for the actions/ of that old man*. Hearts were mended. As the village sang, the trees absorbed the throb of words in their own chests.

Alas, the marriage failed. You wouldn't know. That isn't it, though. This is: this fog, this painted blanket. Us, shivering on each other, mouths miming words we're not sure of. The leaves grown heavy. The leaves nodding.

Poem

Come like Coco comes: pink hair and shoes,
pinch-cheeked and round.
I shall expect you at the station, Waterloo,
Platform 19, as the sun goes down
behind the carriages of the 18:52.
I'll cut for you a nice figure in my best Nike high-top boots.

And when you come I'll bite you on both knees,
as I always do to Coco – like a scared
and wide-eyed orphan; she my foster-mother,
            no, my churlish *Nancy*.
I will weep from grubby eyes to see you, all fireworks and tender.
Whip me up, take me beneath your puff-sleeves

and show me cut-out, brilliant London
as Coco does, my *Nancy*. Show me
swindlers' dens and flower girls, and let me fall in love with them.
Place me hidden in a cluster of hungry men
who swig from pint pots, swinging L-shaped arms
to base themselves in our drunk song.

And pain me to see your bold arse, Nancy,
smacked by sailors and dishonest men. Expose me
to the menace of thieves and save me from them.
Choreograph this. Make it dance like Coco does,
and I'll breathe my idiot smile as you lead me
along some rogue back alley to our selfish little end.

Cake

When first I saw her lips meet another man's face I didn't think
Slut! I thought Cake   I thought a pink and iced castle cake stark
and alone in the garden rain   the party departed its glowering
candle dumbstruck   one small flame tearing for the now moistening air
when first I saw her lips meet another man's face

I didn't think How could anyone do this to another man's face?
I pictured that big yellow bowl I pictured that brown wooden
spoon my mother used to stir its colouring mixture its colouring
mixture rolling further and further toward its intended self
when first I saw when first I saw her lips

I saw a warm sponge rise in the oven of my mother's kitchen
to meet its supposéd and predestined shape I saw it cut its well-
sprung figure I saw its proud stature and the icing on top and
my mother's   her gladdened hands in her apron   I thought Cake
when first I saw another man   her lips on another man's face

The party gone inside my mother's work my mother's finely
crafted work the care she took a wet cake in the garden

(First appeared on http://greatbritishbardoff.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/cake-by-wayne-holloway-smith.html)

Pear Tree

Remember then the tree in its canopy of white,

its rotund fruit dappled in August, resplendent.

Remember the full volume, in August, of its Christmas fanfare:

erect and lovely and the singular partridge, the kirrr-icking soul

of it, at rest and contented to reflect back your gaze.

Remember this: you looked at each other so hard,

the tree's seed became rounder and you and the tree

became for a moment each other.

                              O it remembers you now,

in the rasp of bronchial winter. Now: it's colours striped

and less, the great air cut to shapes through its oxidized bones.

Its beaked soul remembers you now, pecking from branch

to branch. Come back.

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