

ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF MODERNITY: THREE GENERATIONS  
OF WORKING-CLASS FICTION (LAWRENCE, GREENWOOD,  
SILLITOE), 1910-1960

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In memory of Herbert Peter Kirkham, grandfather and chemist

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And most of all I thank my family for their constant support and love.

## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

## ABSTRACT

In my thesis, I examine the development of working-class fiction in the twentieth century. I trace the development from D. H. Lawrence, in a period of gradually increasing linguistic and political working-class enfranchisement, through Walter Greenwood, in a period of industrial depression, to the popular success of Alan Sillitoe, in a period of great economic freedom.

My thesis explores the ambiguities of the twentieth-century project of English working-class fiction and challenges received versions of working-class identity and of working-class writing. Across a fifty year history, I ask a wide range of theoretical questions. I look at the subject of enfranchisement, both linguistic and political. I reassess the significance of so-called regionalism, in the context of a dominant metropolitan modernity. I argue that working-class writing was an alternative to modernism rather than a residual cultural form. I disentangle the issue of authenticity from the variously prevailing progressivist definitions and trace the evolution of local class identities under the pressure of an increasingly nationalized culture. I describe and analyse the complex play of local, regional, and metropolitan-national affiliations as they are played out in three successive generations of writers in the regional-metropolitan arenas of Edwardian and postwar Nottingham and interwar Salford.

I conclude the thesis by arguing that working-class fiction has developed from the tense introspection of the early Lawrence to the aggressive confidence of Sillitoe. This

literary development runs alongside increased economic prosperity and political representation. The development is acted out in terms of introspective conflict – political, regional, sexual, literary, and in relation to class. Finally, the emergence of film as a popular medium enabled greater artistic and commercial representation of working-class communities. I finish by concluding that the advance of working-class fiction from Lawrence to Sillitoe helped lead to the pre-eminence of working-class culture in the 1960s.



## ABBREVIATIONS

### Primary Sources

- S&L* D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (Cambridge, 1992)
- LD* Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole* (Flamingo, 1993)
- SN* Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Flamingo, 1994)
- TSL* David Storey, *This Sporting Life* (Vintage, 2000)
- RT* John Braine, *Room at the Top* (Arrow Books, 2002)

### Secondary Sources

- CCE* Roger Moore, *Community and Conflict in Eastwood: A Study From the Nottinghamshire Coalfield Before 1914* (Nottingham, 1995)
- CS* Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century* (Penguin, 1971)
- DNB* *Dictionary of National Biography*  
(<http://www.oxforddnb.com/>)
- EJ* J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (Heinemann, 1934)
- EY* John Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Years 1885-1912* (Cambridge, 1991)
- M* Alan Kidd, *Manchester* (Edinburgh, 2003)
- RL* Stuart Laing, *Representations of Working-Class Life 1957-1964* (Macmillan, 1986)

## INTRODUCTION

“Unlike the pseudos I am *of* – not *for* – the working class”<sup>1</sup>

In one of his many complex discussions of his relationship with the urban Scottish working class, Scottish poet and Communist Party member Hugh MacDiarmid highlights the complexities, expectations, and contradictions that a writer from a working-class background faced throughout the twentieth century. In the expectation that the writer would represent his class, a regional and political authenticity was demanded in a manner not expected of writers from a middle- or upper-class background. Through a Marxist class consciousness, he was furthermore expected to present the concerns of the working class to an influential literary élite, be fired by an angry class resentment, and in some cases “adhere to the current strategy of the Communist Party.”<sup>2</sup> However, this demand for authenticity created a contradiction, for any authentic account was forced to emphasize working-class political conservatism. This was then further complicated by the literary aims of the writer, often personal and individual, concerned more with literary tradition than political representation. The novels I study in this thesis are not *for* the working class in any ideological way; rather they are of importance because the writers

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh MacDiarmid, “Third Hymn to Lenin,” in *Complete Poems 1920-1976: Volume II*, eds. Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken (London: Martin Brian & O’Keefe, 1978), 900.

<sup>2</sup> Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 63.

and the fiction are *of* the working class. They give voice to working-class culture, but that literary and cultural voice is fluid and deliberately inconsistent. The fiction adds to and endorses working-class mythologies, whilst at the same time challenging and subverting them.

In this thesis, I look at three moments and three different perceptions of class in twentieth-century history. These perceptions are fictional interpretations of class, which form part of a wider temporal definition of the English working class. The first moment is at the Edwardian turn into mechanized modernity, coinciding with a prolonged period of gradual political, economic, and linguistic class emancipation. D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913) explores the conflicts and contradictions between individual, class, and mass consciousness, between social mobility and regional immobility, and between the English rural tradition and the onset of industrialized modernity. The tensions of modernity are echoed in the class tensions that cause the intellectual confusion of the artistic hero, Paul Morel. Lawrence's alternative to modernity is to emphasize the rural tradition and to focus on the emancipation of the working class, but this alternative is constrained by the myths of working-class culture which are necessary to secure working-class identity but which limit a social and intellectual mobility. Lawrence's achievement in *Sons and Lovers* is to present the culture of his working-class community to a metropolitan audience in a persuasively realist manner. By emphasizing the fluidity and complexity of his community, he underscores the difficulty individual consciousness has in conforming to and rejecting the shared myths and concepts which forge perceptions of working-class communities. This achievement enabled future working-class writers to portray their class in complex ways which challenge perceived ideas of class and community.

The second moment occurs at the international economic crisis of the early 1930s, when interest in the working class was at a high, particularly among intellectual socialists (see pp.102 ff.). Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* (1933) is shaped by the pressures of

modernity. Its characters, linked together by class, profession, and community, struggle to cope with the advance of mechanized industrialism and international capitalism and socialism. But, like Lawrence, Greenwood successfully and persuasively presents his community realistically to a metropolitan readership. At a moment of international crisis, he draws on a tradition of regional writing as part of a national identity in order to emphasize the centrality of local culture to national culture. He adapts the authentic representation of his community in order to appeal to metropolitan expectations of working-class literacy, decency, and community. The achievement of *Love on the Dole* is not only to have brought the economic suffering of the working class to national attention, but also to have helped make working-class culture a central facet of national identity.

The third moment is at the economic affluence of the late 1950s, when class, sexual, and adolescent emancipation was far advanced. Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) rejects the socialist myths and illusions of the 1930s, but it is also a novel moulded by the myths and illusions which accelerated class emancipation and representation in the aftermath of the Second World War. The novel foregrounds a different and new kind of class: powerful, confident, independent, and young. But *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is still grounded in mythical perceptions of class: community, family, and the workplace. Sillitoe draws upon the prewar attempts to create a working-class literary culture to forge a new mythological working class that came to dominate perceptions of the working class from the 1960s onwards. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is not simply an alternative to modernity in the manner in which it rejects stable concepts of the postwar working class, it also creates a new modernity that is brash, aggressive, and attractive.

These representations of working-class communities and workplaces fashion alternative forms of modernity, for they challenge, question, and shape the developments

of a new, industrial, modern Britain during the prolonged period of the conflicting rise of international capitalism, communism, and fascism. They emphasize the local within national and international contexts. They challenge both metropolitan and socialist orthodoxy by representing their own working-class communities in ways which contradict progressivist views. On the one hand, they endorse those views by showcasing a working-class literacy and by conforming to myths of class togetherness, but, on the other hand, they undermine them by revealing a class constantly changing due to local, national, and international pressures; by refusing to follow socialist precepts on how to represent the working class; and by portraying a class which is conservative and resistant to outside interference.

Attempting to define the proletarian novel, Roy Johnson writes that without centuries of cultural tradition to draw on the novel is forced to conform to and uphold middle-class values. In an effort to resist those values, the proletarian writer adapts a militant Marxist ideology to structure the novel, which “will turn it into documentary or propaganda rather than a balanced work of art.”<sup>3</sup> Johnson is right to point to the contradictions caused by writing for a predominantly middle-class audience. It means that the realist authenticity of the novels is pulled in different directions – by left-wing intellectuals wishing for a politicized representation of the working class, yet simultaneously towards a middle-class readership wary of any political propaganda. However, contrary to Johnson’s definition, this opposition is further exaggerated by the authors’ refusal to adopt Marxist ideological descriptions of the working class, instead using descriptions which are personal and localized. Class becomes a perception or a feeling as much as an economic, political, or sociological concept. E. P. Thompson, in his preface to *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), writes that he does “not see class as a ‘structure’, nor even as a ‘category’, but as something which in fact happens

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<sup>3</sup> Roy Johnson, “The Proletarian Novel,” in *Literature and History* 2 (October 1975), 94.

(and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships.” He emphasizes the fluidity of class consciousness and class identity, caused by time, place, and individual interpretation: “Consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way. ... Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition.”<sup>4</sup> Richard Hoggart, in his study of the English working class, *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), emphasizes the importance of local attitudes to definitions of class: “the core of working-class attitudes ... is a sense of the personal, the concrete, the local: it is embodied in the idea of, first, the family and, second, the neighbourhood.”<sup>5</sup> Fictional portraits of the working class make the local central to their definition of class in order to emphasize the authenticity of their account and also to shape national perceptions of the working class. At the centre of working-class fiction is this complex set of relationships between the individual, the local, the regional, the national, and the international, contradictory relationships which define and shape perceptions of class.

Class membership is of greater significance than class consciousness. Although class in each novel is strongly defined by and linked to work, labour, and capital – in Marxist terms, “defined by the relations of its members to the means of production” – this is only part of that definition, for region, religion, leisure, sexuality, and family are of equal importance.<sup>6</sup> The authors I study “take the articulation of class difference as a manifestly symbolic consideration ... as a contentious, unstable point,” refusing to present a clearly defined working class, but one which is necessarily contradictory.<sup>7</sup> The working class are not viewed in nationally or internationally homogenous terms, but through strongly local

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<sup>4</sup> E. P Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Books, 1991 [1963]), 8-10.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments* (London: Penguin Books, 1957), 33.

<sup>6</sup> “Marxism,” <http://www-formal.stanford.edu/pub/jmc/progress/marxism.html>, accessed 09/02/2006.

<sup>7</sup> Peter J. Kalliney, *Cities of Affluence and Anger: A Literary Geography of Modern Englishness* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 3.

and regional associations in order to focus on individual struggles for self-definition and self-understanding.

Erich Auerbach defined the realist novel as containing “a most accurate and detailed knowledge of the political situation, the social stratification, and the economic circumstances of a perfectly definite historical moment.”<sup>8</sup> For these reasons, Lukács, the Marxist champion of realism, saw the realist novel as a politically revolutionary act, with the potential to incite the working class to political action and class consciousness.<sup>9</sup> The realism of *Sons and Lovers*, *Love on the Dole*, and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* follows Auerbach’s definition but is made ambiguous by the pull of the different potential audiences. Furthermore, Lawrence, Greenwood, and Sillitoe do not conform to Lukács’s Marxist view of the realist novel, for the three authors are more concerned with individual experience than with exciting a collective political consciousness. Stephen Heath summarizes the fundamental questions that realism both addresses and creates. For Heath, the relationship between the individual and society is of central concern:

Realism, in fact, is produced in the novel as a social narration of the individual as problem: what, where, how is the meaning of the individual in this prosaic world, confronted thus by society, by history? The novel ceaselessly makes sense for the individual, brings him or her – hero or heroine but also simultaneously the reader as its addressed agent – into this new field of reality, into recognition, knowledge, meaning. Crucially, its realism is a response to instability: the novel coincides with the development of a new form of social organisation, that of capitalism, in which, precisely, society and the individual become the terms of reference, in which the social relations of the individual – ‘the individual and society’, as we have learnt to say – become a problem as such.<sup>10</sup>

This helps explain how the three authors deal with the industrial societies, and more specifically the industrial communities, which form their environment. Fundamental to each novel is a crisis, either of individual experience or of (capitalist) society as a whole.

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<sup>8</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974 [1953]), 455.

<sup>9</sup> See György Lukács, “Realism in the Balance” (1938), in *The Norton Anthology of Literary Theory*, eds. Vincent B. Leitch et al (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 1033-58.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Heath, “Realism, modernism, and ‘language-consciousness’,” in *Realism in European Literature: Essays in Honour of J. P. Stern*, eds. Nicholas Boyle and Martin Swales (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 109.

How the individual resolves or fails to resolve that crisis is key to the narrative of the novel.

The realist representation of local community forms the backdrop to the experience of the individual. The significance of this differs from nineteenth-century realist literature, for Lawrence, Greenwood, and Sillitoe are working-class authors writing about their working-class community to an outside audience. This inside realism accounts in part for the commercial and popular success of all three writers, for this success is based on the assumption that the working-class writers, in a realist context, are telling their readers how life is lived in those working-class communities. For *Sons and Lovers*, *Love on the Dole*, and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, the authenticity of each novel – the responsibility of describing an underrepresented community to a national audience – is key to its success. But this authenticity produces contradictions within the novels, due, on one hand, to a political authenticity conforming to either socialist or Marxist expectations and, on the other, a local authenticity which results in a complicated and often contradictory portrait of a conservative working class.

The political implications of realism differ from the more neutral, observational qualities of authenticity. Authenticity is more of a sentiment than a definition, a feeling that this is how it is.. Steven Connor writes that, “Novels seem to have some of the authority of the eye-witness account ... concentrat[ing] together representations of how the world is, or seems to be, with the shaping force of fantasy or imagination.”<sup>11</sup> It is this authority of authenticity, of being the “eye-witness” presenting a community to an outside audience, which gives the novels much of their power, but which also causes many of the contradictions within the novels. Using many scare quotes to emphasize the fragility of the notion of authenticity, Vincent Sherry writes that, “the quality of the ‘authentic’ or the ‘genuine’ or ‘original’ represents the pressure of the ‘contemporary,’ it

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<sup>11</sup> Steven Connor, *The English Novel in History 1950-1995* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 1.



speaks with a certain feeling for this certain 'moment,' it registers one special 'period' with some accountability to the standard of the reliable witness."<sup>12</sup> This definition points to the success of the novels studied in this thesis, for they are all focused on the contemporary, passing the test of the "reliable witnesses" that the London readership felt itself to be. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that "all communities ... are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."<sup>13</sup> This points to the question of authenticity in the novels, for, in essence, there are different imagined communities present, all vying for authenticity: the community itself; the author's own rendering of his community; leftist ideological views of the working class; and the middle-class and London perceptions of a working-class community. Moreover, in describing communities which have been excluded from the national voice, the novels conform to Lionel Trilling's definition of authenticity: "much that culture traditionally condemned and sought to exclude is accorded a considerable moral authority by reason of the authenticity claimed for it, for example, disorder, violence, unreason."<sup>14</sup>

The authors acknowledge and question the contradictions of their class association, which come from the complex relationship between local and national versions of the working class, from an uneasy sense of class membership, and from the possibility of social mobility. These contradictions also come from the many variants of left-wing politics wishing to represent the working class to a national audience. The possibilities of representation come through Marxist class consciousness; communism; trade unions; the Labour Party; and socialist intellectuals. All these political movements have conflicts between the local and the national, and sometimes the international, as well as conflicts between themselves, which make the difficulty of representing the working class all the

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<sup>12</sup> Vincent Sherry, "On the Question of Modernism and the 'Authentic'," in *Modernism/Modernity* 14:3 (September 2007), 481.

<sup>13</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 15.

<sup>14</sup> Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 11.

greater. During the thesis, I make clear how national directives and strict ideological issues clashed with local actualities – for example the relationship between the Nottinghamshire Mining Association and the Liberal Party which contrasted with the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain’s national affiliation with Labour; or the contrast between the Salford conservative working class in *Love on the Dole* and the rigid ideology of the Communist Party’s “class against class” policy. These conflicts and contradictions within the Left provide some of the narrative and thematic tension of the novels studied in this thesis.

Both local and national views of the working class are founded on a series of mythical perceptions which also leads to some of the contradictions within the novels. These myths of community solidarity, family togetherness, and left-wing political affiliation, which Hoggart discusses in great detail in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), are examined and challenged by Lawrence, Greenwood, and Sillitoe. Once again, using these myths shapes the authenticity or realism of the novels; when following traditional perceptions of the working class the novels seem more authentic to their readership and, in reverse, when challenging these myths they appear less authentic and create more controversy. I discuss in the chapter on *Love on the Dole*, for example, how Greenwood plays with middle-class perceptions of the working class to excite the sympathy of middle-class readers, which caused controversy among those who demanded an account more suited to left-wing perceptions.

I place Lawrence at the beginning of a working-class tradition which has continued to present fictional portraits of the working class in a similar manner to Lawrence, stressing the uncomfortable but vital relationship between the individual, his community and region, and society. Andy Croft has written on the influence Lawrence held over 1930s working-class writers, who followed the form of working-class fiction – the young male coming to terms with his industrial community (usually a mining community) – which

Lawrence had established in *Sons and Lovers*.<sup>15</sup> This influence carried through into the 1940s and 1950s, not just in fiction but also in the writings of literary and cultural intellectuals such as F. R. Leavis, Raymond Williams, and Richard Hoggart. Journals such as *Essays in Criticism* and Leavis's *Scrutiny* used Lawrence as the basis for debate on the meaning and value of literature. Leavis's writings on Lawrence, which he published in *Scrutiny*, culminated in *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist* (1955). For Leavis, Lawrence is "our last great writer; he is still the great writer of our own phase of civilization. The questions and stresses that preoccupied him have still the most urgent relevance for us to-day."<sup>16</sup>

Leavis's laudatory view of Lawrence was not accepted universally, but it indicates the importance attached to Lawrence in the 1950s.<sup>17</sup> This is also made apparent through Raymond Williams's critical writings, in which Williams gives Lawrence prominence, such as *Culture and Society* (1958) and later, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1970), and also in Williams's first novel *Border Country* (1960), as I discuss in the Afterword. The importance of Lawrence's work reached its culmination in the Chatterley trial, at which both Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart gave evidence, in 1960.

This tradition of working-class fiction generated by Lawrence follows on from nineteenth-century English literature, in its use of realism, language, and narrative structure. But it also moves on from that formal realism to give a more personal account of working-class life, which foregrounds regional culture and community. One key aspect of this tradition is the use of dialect, which emphasizes the regional authenticity of the fictional account. As I show in my discussions of Greenwood and the 1950s fiction, this linguistic authenticity is often handled with some discomfort; it is a significant example

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<sup>15</sup> Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days*, 59-95.

<sup>16</sup> F. R. Leavis, *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962 [1955]), 9.

<sup>17</sup> Leavis outlines in his introduction to *D. H. Lawrence* that much of his writing on Lawrence was written in direct opposition to T. S. Eliot's views on Lawrence. For criticism of both Lawrence and Leavis, see Robert Liddell, "Lawrence and Dr. Leavis," in *Essays in Criticism* 4:3 (July 1954), 321-27; responses to this article were published the following year in *Essays in Criticism* 5:1 (January 1955), 64-80. For a critical overview of Leavis's writing on Lawrence, see R. P. Bilan, *The Literary Criticism of F. R. Leavis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 195-272.

of the difficulty working-class authors have in proving the authenticity of the fictionalized portrait of their community. This use of spoken language clearly follows on from the complex positioning of dialect and regional language in Lawrence's work.

In his early short stories, in *Sons and Lovers*, and in *The Rainbow*, Lawrence uses regional language variation to make clear his personal involvement in the community he is describing. The use of language and dialect stresses the authenticity of his account. It also connects his work, as does his use of the realist form, to the novels of the great nineteenth-century English writers. But Lawrence's use of language distances him from novelists such as Gaskell, Dickens, and Eliot, who used regional language to create a feeling of national inclusivity. Their portrayals of the rural and urban working class emphasize the displacement caused by industrialization. By highlighting the regional variation and linguistic integrity of the working class, they point to the inclusive vibrancy of national culture. Lawrence follows this tradition, but makes his fiction centrally focused on a regional independence from national culture. His use of language highlights the closed nature of his community; it also stresses the variations of language within that community, not dictated by class or social position, but by place, situation, and moment. Lawrence also differs from nineteenth-century writers by, particularly in *The Rainbow*, using regional forms in the narrative. This tactic again emphasizes the authenticity of his account and makes clear the author's involvement in the actions and the formation of his community. The informalization of the formal narrative sets Lawrence's fiction apart from other accounts of working-class life, giving it an immediate and urgent familiarity.

Lawrence's use of regional language is an example of the linguistic emancipation that the working class were beginning to enjoy, which allows Lawrence to give voice to the working class in their own language. That language is presented without explanation, comedy, or political intent. The opportunity to publish given him by Ford Madox Hueffer is a dramatic example of the possibility of the working class finding a voice in a

national culture, which Lawrence pushes to its fullest extent. Urged by Hueffer to write about his working-class community, Lawrence moves away from the formal, standard English of his early fiction to embrace the linguistic diversity of his community and to celebrate and advance the linguistic emancipation he was experiencing.

Lawrence's use of language demonstrates the burgeoning confidence of the English working class, which educational opportunities and political and trade union representation had produced. It is removed from Gaskell's early fiction which, through middle-class altruism, wished to present the voice of the English working class to a national audience. In *Mary Barton* (1848), however, she was unsure whether that audience wished to hear or was able to understand that voice, carefully translating in footnotes any unusual local words. But the widespread use of dialect in nineteenth-century literature, for example in Gaskell's *North and South* (1854) where it is presented with a much greater confidence, reveals the acceptance that working-class culture was part of a wider national culture. This gradual development enables Lawrence to write in the language of his community with assurance, ease, and purpose.

Aware of the difficulty in both writing and reading dialect, Lawrence took great care in transcribing dialect. Shortly after writing *The Rainbow*, Lawrence wrote that, "The difficulty is, that one reads with the eye as well as the ear. Consequently ... the mind mechanically halts, saying, 'What strange word is this?' And to pull up the mind like that is fatal ... . Unless the effect of sound is conveyed simultaneously with eye-picture, there is discrepancy and awkwardness."<sup>18</sup> Lawrence avoids this difficulty by moving away from the uncomfortable break between the formal, distant narrative voice and the spoken dialect of the working class which occurs in the fiction of Gaskell, Eliot, and Hardy. Instead, he merges the two voices together in an immediate, inclusive style. This creates a greater unity within the fiction and gives a greater linguistic power to the working class.

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<sup>18</sup> John Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Years 1885-1912* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 63-64. Henceforth abbreviated *EY*.

The language of the community is partially independent from a standard form of English, foregrounding regional authority and culture.

The linguistic variations which occur in working-class fiction signify the involved relationship between regional working-class culture and national culture. Raymond Williams describes “regional fiction” as “one which does not include the conflicts of the larger society of which the region is evidently a part.”<sup>19</sup> Although Williams felt that much of the working-class writing of the 1930s is “profoundly regional in the sense that the very forces which operate from outside on the formation and destiny of the class itself ... cannot be represented within them,” *Sons and Lovers*, *Love on the Dole*, and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* are not regional novels for precisely that reason: they interweave the local, the regional, and the national within the international context.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout this study, I investigate the manner in which the three novels are informed by local culture, tradition, and politics. I examine how national and international politics alter and shape perceptions of local community. I see the three novels and the communities they portray shaped by English identity and by metropolitan – i.e. London – attitudes to the English working class. I see the Second World War as a transforming moment in working-class culture and identity, which is reflected in the fiction of the late 1950s. It is this transformation which affects the status of the working class and creates the conditions for the confidence and increased affluence of the working class towards the end of the 1950s and in the 1960s.

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<sup>19</sup> Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: NLB, 1979), 247.

<sup>20</sup> Williams, *Politics and Letters*, 267.

## CHAPTER ONE

# **THE FORGING OF A WORKING-CLASS TRADITION IN D. H. LAWRENCE'S *SONS AND LOVERS***

At the centre of D. H. Lawrence's first major novel, *Sons and Lovers*, is what Raymond Williams describes as "[t]he familiar crisis ... of education, relationship and identity."<sup>21</sup> This crisis is the foundation for a "series of cultural dislocations" – dislocations that are social, regional, and of class.<sup>22</sup> In this chapter, I examine how in *Sons and Lovers* Lawrence explores the conflicts which arise from these dislocations. Rather than reading *Sons and Lovers* as a successfully realist novel, I argue that Lawrence's focus on individual experience affects the realist presentation of the novel and undermines the novel's reliability as a social document. There is a conflict between nineteenth-century realist form and the modernist impulses of Lawrence's own artistic and intellectual development. This generates an unresolved tension in the novel. This tension between realism and modernism is emblematic of the crises of modernity present within *Sons and Lovers*: the divide between the rural and the industrial; tradition and the modern; social representation and individual experience. These crises point towards a novel in conflict with itself, a conflict which Lawrence deliberately does not resolve, echoing the unresolved industrial, personal, marital, and sexual conflicts within the novel.

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<sup>21</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), 265.

<sup>22</sup> John Goole, "D. H. Lawrence," in *History of Literature in the English Language, Volume 7: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Bernard Bergonzi (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1970), 118.



Lawrence was writing *Sons and Lovers* in a period of great social and cultural change. Growing up in a mining community meant that he was personally experiencing that change; his education and wide reading meant that he was also able to observe, appreciate, and investigate that shift. The conflict between experience and appreciation is what Lawrence explores in *Sons and Lovers*. Following on, but moving away, from a tradition of social realism, Lawrence investigates his working-class community, its industrial and geographical splits, in order to explore his own intellectual and artistic development.

Critical readings of *Sons and Lovers* have focused on how Lawrence gave a realist representation of the industrial community in which he had been brought up, making the novel itself part of the region's material history. I argue, however, that Lawrence's emphasis on his own aesthetic experiences makes realist representation impossible, for it is intentionally subjective and personalized. However, Lawrence also destabilizes this personalized realism by altering the novel's autobiographical elements in order to reflect the social and intellectual uncertainty of the modernist hero. The emphasis on unstable personal experience over social representation acts as a metaphor for the transition from nineteenth-century industrialism to twentieth-century modernity.

In my reading of *Sons and Lovers*, I discuss how Lawrence presented his community in the novel and how his artistic, imaginative, and intellectual concerns inflect that presentation. I compare *Sons and Lovers* with the short stories, particularly "The Miner at Home," which Lawrence wrote during the process of completing the novel. In these stories, in order to achieve a commercial success, Lawrence focused on the industrial conflict, within the context of a national political crisis, which his community was facing at that time. The stories demonstrate the increased maturity of Lawrence as a writer, his developing ability to write about his community, and his awareness of the labour politics which affected his family and his community.

Although *Sons and Lovers* holds throughout to Lawrence's initial description of it as "the colliery novel," the novel does not continue the stories' investigation into social and labour politics.<sup>23</sup> Against the backdrop of social, political, and cultural change, particularly amongst the working class, Lawrence intended to present his community to a readership unfamiliar with it in a manner which conforms partially to the social reality. But, more centrally, he also intended to work out his own personal, sexual, and artistic development within the novel amidst the conflict of his parents' marriage. In this chapter, I highlight how Lawrence's personal conflicts – sex, class, education, family – are woven into the novel on to the semi-realistic backdrop of the industrial mining village of Bestwood.

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<sup>23</sup> *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence: Volume 1*, ed. James T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 370, 371, and 381. Henceforth abbreviated *Letters*, i.

# I. Historical Contexts

## 1. Introduction

In *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1970), Raymond Williams argues that the English novel was transformed in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution by the urbanization of English culture, which in the 1840s reached a “decisive ... point of consciousness.” In the work of Dickens and other writers of the 1840s, the urbanization of the English people and the “institutions of an urban culture” were incorporated, examined, and defined in the English novel.<sup>24</sup> The aim of the novel changed to “defining the society, rather than merely reflecting it,” based on what Williams terms a personal “crisis of experience.” In a very different way from F. R. Leavis, Williams sees Lawrence at the climax of this urban, industrial tradition, following on from Dickens, Eliot, and Hardy in the central focus of that tradition: “the exploration of community: the substance and meaning of community.”<sup>25</sup> From the 1840s onwards, the novel questions and defines the concept of community in an urban, industrialized context, particularly in its relation to the individual:

What community is, what it has been, what it might be; how community relates to individuals and relationships; how men and women, directly engaged, see within them or beyond them, for but more often against them, the shape of a society ... . People became more aware of great social and historical changes which altered not only outward forms – institutions and landscapes – but also inward feelings, experiences, self-definitions.<sup>26</sup>

The profound change of individual experience and the way people thought about historical change in the context of their own individual experience within the

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<sup>24</sup> Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), 9.

<sup>25</sup> Williams, *The English Novel*, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Williams, *The English Novel*, 12.

development of an urban community altered the conception of the novel: “Society from being a framework could now be seen as an agency, even an actor, a character.”<sup>27</sup>

Although Dickens, Eliot, and Hardy all wrote of communities with which they were familiar, the community which Lawrence wrote about was integral to his upbringing. More than any of these nineteenth-century writers, Lawrence was writing from *within* his community, rather than observing and investigating from outside. Williams stresses that this is the great development in Lawrence’s work: “the language of the writer [i.e. Lawrence] is at one with the language of his characters, in a way that hadn’t happened, though George Eliot and Hardy had tried, since the earlier smaller community of the novel had been extended and changed.” Rather than imitating the language of an invented community, the dialogue in his first short stories, *Sons and Lovers*, and *The Rainbow* is the language he had heard since he was a child. This intimacy, as Williams stresses, is vital to the style and success of Lawrence’s early fiction: “He is writing like that because he is feeling with his people, not of them or about them, but within a particular flow.”<sup>28</sup> Williams later commented that the narrative of *The English Novel* should have begun with 1790s writing, extending the length of the tradition Lawrence was inheriting. This extension in effect further distances Lawrence’s writing – and the work of other twentieth-century working-class writers – from the “unknowable communities” described by Dickens and Eliot; in the emphasis in working-class fiction on local and regional culture, the authors are able successfully to describe their own “knowable communities” to a metropolitan audience.<sup>29</sup>

Williams’s tradition echoes, but in its emphasis on the industrial basis of the literature contrasts with, Leavis’s *The Great Tradition*: “Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James,

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<sup>27</sup> Williams, *The English Novel*, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, *The English Novel*, 173.

<sup>29</sup> See Williams, *Politics and Letters*, 245 and 247.

Conrad, and D. H. Lawrence: the great tradition of the English novel is *there*.”<sup>30</sup>

Lawrence’s status within a literary tradition was emphasized by many of his early critics, such as Graham Hough in *The Dark Sun* (1956), who wondered if Lawrence was part of an English or a European tradition. Hough questions whether Lawrence can be seen as part of any tradition as he was “too idiosyncratic.” Unlike Williams or Leavis, Hough feels that Lawrence “does [not] fit ... easily into English literary history,” for “he breaks with the mainly sociological tradition of the English novel.”<sup>31</sup> Due to this difficulty which Hough highlights, it makes more sense to place Lawrence in a tradition of working-class fiction. Lawrence, as Williams emphasizes, uses the nineteenth-century tradition of social realism to describe and investigate his working-class community, but he also breaks away from that tradition to create a more personalized realism, an investigation into the experience and development of individual consciousness in an industrial community. It is this new tradition which influences the development of working-class fiction in the twentieth century.

This strangled break from nineteenth-century tradition is shared by the characters in Lawrence’s early novels. The characters are also steeped in traditions – of religion, class, community – traditions which define yet inhibit them. In *Sons and Lovers*, it is the tradition of a mining community which Paul Morel challenges, questions, and attempts to escape; the tradition is also challenged from outside by education and by the suffrage and labour movements. In *The Rainbow*, the tradition is more clearly defined, as Lawrence outlines in great detail the transition from a rural, agricultural tradition to a new industrial modernity in the process of establishing a new tradition in mining communities.

Lawrence read voraciously, mainly the works of well-known nineteenth-century authors, English writers such as Eliot and Hardy, the French realists Flaubert and Balzac,

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<sup>30</sup> F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960 [1948]), 28.

<sup>31</sup> Graham Hough, *The Dark Sun: A Study of D. H. Lawrence* (London: Duckworth, 1956), 3.

the Russian writers Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, and contemporary writers such as Wells; he discussed his reading intensely with his friends, mainly Jessie Chambers, Louie Burrows, and Blanche Jennings. Throughout his early letters, references to George Meredith occur, particularly in reference to his own writing. He accuses Meredith of, like himself at the time, putting “too much thought into verse,” although he praised his “very fine” poetry, calling “Love in a Valley” “a bag of jewels, rare, precious as can be, and beautiful – but they want a bit of setting” (*Letters*, i.242). Lawrence was constantly sceptical of writing, particularly poetry, that has too much sentiment or romantic feeling, but he was also wary of writing that carries too many intellectual ideas, a contradiction which explains the difficulty Lawrence found in developing his own writing. Both *The White Peacock* (1911) and *The Trespasser* (1912) struggle uneasily with excesses of sentiment and thought and it took three drafts of “Paul Morel” until the completion of *Sons and Lovers* (1913) for Lawrence to balance the contrary impulses. Once he had completed *Sons and Lovers*, he thought that “it might find a good public among the Meredithy public” (*Letters*, i.511). He clearly appreciated Meredith’s work and pictured himself in the same category as writer, but, as with many other writers, deliberately distanced himself, wishing to dissociate himself from the over-intellectualism of Meredith’s poetry: “Meredith’s *Tragic Comedians* ... is wonderfully clever: not a work of art, too turgid” (*Letters*, i.250).

His criticism of Meredith is echoed in his comments on H. G. Wells. Lawrence was guarded in his appreciation of Wells, writing that he was “fond of him” but “not deeply moved by him,” amused by the way in which he “seize[d] the typical manners of his class,” but exasperated that “not one of his characters has got a real *being*.”<sup>32</sup> For Lawrence, Wells lacked “the subtle soul of sympathy of the true artist” (*Letters*, i.119).

However, Wells and Lawrence were not dissimilar, for Wells wrote, equally

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<sup>32</sup> *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence: Volume 2*, eds. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1981), 74.

controversially, of similar themes to Lawrence. Wondering about the erotic content in “The Saga of Siegmund” (which became *The Trespasser*), Lawrence worried that “I don’t want to be talked about in an *Anne (sic) Veronica* fashion” (*Letters*, i.339), referring to the furore which greeted Wells’s “New Woman” novel. Like Lawrence, Wells was concerned with “the Victorian conventions and restrictions about sex ... which his ardent nature longed to expose” and held a desire to achieve “a better relationship between men and women.”<sup>33</sup>

Lawrence and Wells can be linked in part, albeit uneasily, because of the similarity between the two writers’ backgrounds. Unlike Lawrence, Wells was lower middle class, the son of an unsuccessful tradesman, but like Lawrence, there was great concern over his future career. Wells was apprenticed to the drapery trade which he hated, whilst Lawrence worked for three months as a clerk in a surgical appliances factory – an experience Lawrence expanded for Paul Morel’s long time working as a clerk in *Sons and Lovers*. Wells’s intense dislike for the drapery trade stemmed from “the deadly monotony, the servility, the feeling that he was imprisoned for life in a great machine where life was impossible.”<sup>34</sup> This was a sentiment Lawrence had also experienced during his time in the factory and in school. Both were pupil teachers and both veered into a writing career through illness which prevented them from continuing to teach. Wells too, like Lawrence, had great difficulty in belonging to movements or organizations, not wishing to be tied to a set philosophy or political stance. Both saw themselves as leaders who could transform the lives of those around them, attacking their opponents with a visionary arrogance which easily offended.

Although Dickens, Gaskell, Eliot, and Hardy wrote of similar concerns to Lawrence, there were few English writers before Lawrence who had come from outside the middle class. Wells’s humble beginnings may have caused Lawrence to read Wells more keenly.

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<sup>33</sup> Lovat Dickson, *H. G. Wells: His Turbulent Life and Times* (London: Penguin, 1969), 19.

<sup>34</sup> Dickson, *H. G. Wells*, 23.

Lawrence was dismissive of George Gissing, declaring that he “hasn’t enough energy, enough sanguinity, to capture me. But I esteem him a good deal” (*Letters*, i.354). The estimation in which Lawrence says he holds Gissing could, once again, come from an admiration for Gissing’s qualified success in rising from poverty, an aspect which Lawrence could separate and use as personal inspiration. But he was also dubious about the romantic notion of the poet suffering for his art, a notion Gissing was susceptible to, Lawrence claiming to have “no sympathy with starvers, Gissings or Chattertons ... the proverbial poor poet in the garret” (*Letters*, i.501). Wells’s and Gissing’s literary and commercial success, rising from difficult circumstances, drew Lawrence to their work. As his reference to the “Meredithy public” shows, Lawrence wished to find a market for his books, an audience who would regularly buy and read his work and give him both a literary and commercial success.

Lawrence consciously inherited the tradition of nineteenth-century realism, whilst determined to develop a new, personalized form which reflected the instability of an industrialized modernity. His wide range of reading, commented on in detail in his letters, demonstrates his determination to find a place within a composite tradition of nineteenth-century and contemporary literature. As Lawrence uses and rejects the realist form, he explores the industrial and cultural traditions of his region in order to emphasize the importance of intellectual experience.

## 2. D. H. Lawrence’s Industrial Midlands

D. H. Lawrence was born in 1885 in Eastwood, a small mining village near Nottingham. Eastwood at the time was expanding into a small town, its population rising



from 2,540 in 1871 to 4,815 thirty years later.<sup>35</sup> Until the mid-nineteenth century, agriculture and hosiery were the town's main industries, but with the advent of the railway, which facilitated transport of coal, mining became Eastwood's dominant industry; the new railways also resulted in easier access to Nottingham, which Lawrence made use of for his education, work, and leisure (*CCE*, 30).<sup>36</sup> This was part of a new industrial Nottinghamshire, which resulted in towns of varying size and importance. Nottingham, with its added industries of hosiery and knitting, was the county's centre. After the Enclosure Act of 1845, Nottingham expanded to absorb local villages as suburbs, its population rising from 50,680 in 1831 to 230,000 in 1900; towns such as Eastwood lost their independent identity, part of a Nottingham-based network.<sup>37</sup> In general, "the urbanization of the coalfield had decisively weakened the relationship between pit and place," but this urbanization was complicated by the individual nature of each mining town and village, which resulted in different local reactions to various regional and national developments and crises.<sup>38</sup>

Mining was the town's dominant industry, the impetus behind social networks; in 1900, there were five pits in the Eastwood area employing 2,750 men (*CCE*, 31).<sup>39</sup> Roy Gregory describes the common characteristic of British mining communities: "Most [miners] lived in villages or small towns where almost everyone was engaged in or dependent upon the coal industry, and in consequence mining communities exhibited an exceptional degree of social and occupational homogeneity."<sup>40</sup> Eastwood was little

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<sup>35</sup> Roger Moore, *Community and Conflict in Eastwood: A Study From the Nottinghamshire Coalfield Before 1914* (Nottingham: The Department of Adult Education University of Nottingham, 1995), 30. Henceforth abbreviated *CCE*.

<sup>36</sup> See also A. R. and C. P. Griffin, "A social and economic history of Eastwood and the Nottinghamshire mining country," in *A D. H. Laurence Handbook*, ed. Keith Sagar (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 127.

<sup>37</sup> David Gilbert, *Class, Community, and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields, 1850-1926* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 162-63.

<sup>38</sup> Gilbert, *Class, Community, and Collective Action*, 170. See also 142.

<sup>39</sup> This figure had increased to 3,123 by 1910 (Griffin, "A social and economic history of Eastwood," in Sagar, *A D. H. Laurence Handbook*, 132).

<sup>40</sup> Roy Gregory, *The Miners in British Politics 1906-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 1-2.

different in this respect, and also in the respect that social divisions in the workplace, with the divisions between facemen and other underground workers and on those on the pit top, and because of the butty system at the top of the collier's social framework were the butties, a position which Lawrence's father, Arthur, held. His job meant leading a small team of miners in the pit and at the end of the week distributing the team's wages; his role is related by Lawrence both in his play *A Collier's Friday Night* and in *Sons and Lovers*, where the father is seen dividing and handing out his team's wages around the kitchen table on a Friday night. The butty system created a slight social division among miners, though as Arthur Lawrence led a small team this social division was not as great as in mines which had operated the big butty system.<sup>41</sup> His father's position as butty, however, meant that the Lawrence family lived at the higher social end of Eastwood – Arthur Lawrence earning “between 35/- and 50/- a week in winter” (*EY*, 37).<sup>42</sup> However, that is not to say that the family position was not precarious. The wages a team took home depended both on the quality of the seam they were working in and on the time of year. Consequently, the weekly wage was not reliable. Strikes and illness could also temporarily take away a miner's wage, factors which had to be accounted for throughout the year. This financial precariousness was a main factor behind industrial action, action which only increased that precariousness. However, the Lawrences lived in comparative comfort. They moved from house to house, until the family, similarly to other butty families, lived at the better end of

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<sup>41</sup> A “big” butty was a collier acting as a contractor; his role was important and central to the running of a pit: he “undertook to produce the coal at so much per ton; ... hired, paid and supervised the labour; ... provided the ropes, ponies or donkeys, pit props and things of that kind; and ... virtually controlled the day-to-day running of the pits.” This changed due to “technological innovations” and greater investment, which led to the employment of trained contractors (Griffin, “Social and economic history of Eastwood,” in Sagar, *A D. H. Lawrence Handbook*, 128). Moore sees this as an emasculating process, for the role of butty had diminished from a contracting system to one of little responsibility (*CCE*, 13).

<sup>42</sup> At 9s 10½d a shift this was far higher than farm labourers (£1 a week) and skilled craftsmen (5s 11d a shift). See Griffin, “Social and economic history of Eastwood,” in Sagar, *A D. H. Lawrence Handbook*, 129.

Eastwood – by the time Lawrence was six, at “The Breach,” a row of houses built by the colliery company Barber Walker (see *EY*, 34-35; *CCE*, 13).<sup>43</sup>

The social position Arthur Lawrence held in the town was, within the family household, complicated and undermined by his wife’s feelings of superiority. Lydia Lawrence’s family, the Beardsalls, had considered themselves, with some affectation, as middle class (see *EY*, 12). Although attracted to the swarthy, uncouth miner, Lydia Lawrence felt that she had married beneath her, a feeling which accounted for much of the antagonism which developed within the marriage. This antagonism coloured the manner in which she brought up her children, with the intention of educating them in order to move them on from the mining community of Eastwood. Through her bitter anger at her marriage, she turned her children against their father and made them feel the apparent deprivation of a mining family’s life. She brought up her children in a non-traditional way, not allowing ascribed gender roles to develop. As a child, Lawrence learnt to cook, clean, and shop – female roles or tasks (see *EY*, 50). In both *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*, it is the women, not the men, who encourage education in their children.

Just a few days before his mother died, Lawrence described his parents to Rachel Annand Taylor, a poet he was in occasional correspondence with. His observations, written as he was beginning “Paul Morel,” form the core of the representation of his parents and their relationship in *Sons and Lovers*. The bias towards his mother, albeit written as she was dying, is clear, as is the influence of her on his perception of himself at this time. In the late 1920s, Lawrence was much more conciliatory towards his father, realizing that his perception had been skewed by the abnormal relationship with his

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<sup>43</sup> See also Griffin, “Social and economic history of Eastwood,” in Sagar, *A D. H. Lawrence Handbook*, 135-41.

mother, which the writing of *Sons and Lovers* was needed to exorcise.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, this stark appraisal, confided to a relative stranger, written in an awkward blend of past and present tense, states clearly his feelings when beginning what became *Sons and Lovers*:

My mother was a clever, ironically delicately moulded woman, of good, old burgher descent. She married below her. My father was dark, ruddy, with a fine laugh. He is a coal miner. He was one of the sanguine temperament, warm and hearty, but unstable: he lacked principle, as my mother would have said. He deceived her and lied to her. She despised him – he drank.

Their marriage has been one carnal, bloody fight, I was born hating my father: as early as ever I can remember, I shivered with horror when he touched me. He was very bad before I was born.

This has been a kind of bond between me and my mother. We have loved each other, almost with a husband and wife love, as well as filial and maternal. (*Letters*, i.190, 3 December 1910)

Lydia Lawrence's social life was quite different from her husband's, which largely revolved around the pub. She regularly attended both the Women's Co-operative Guild, an organization which provided a forum for discussion, and the local chapel. Chapel, Congregationalist and nonconformist, was at the centre of Lawrence's childhood and the focus of his cultural life. Moore notes that "the tendency to worship apart from other miners" at the Congregational Chapel, "known locally as 'the butty's lump'," is an example of the superior standing butties held in their community (*CCE*, 13; see also *EY*, 65). His mother attended regularly, not only because of her strong religious beliefs, but also because it gave her a rare contact with women she considered her equal – although Worthen notes that "the doctrine of self-improvement she found at the Women's Co-operative Guild ... was rather more important to her" (*EY*, 65). Lawrence too attended regularly, although he later abandoned "his rather deep, religious faith" (*Letters*, i.72, September 1908). Chapel provided a basis for intellectual discussion in his adolescence. Every Sunday, he and his friends debated and discussed religious ideas, the preacher's sermon, and other writings (see *EY*, 66). Thus, as in many other mining communities, religion provided a social and intellectual connection. However, unlike Wales, where there was a strong link between religion, the unions, and political consciousness, religion

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<sup>44</sup> See "Nottinghamshire and the Mining Country," in D. H. Lawrence, *Selected Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 1950), 114-22.

in Nottinghamshire did not provide such a politically radical platform. Worthen describes the Eastwood Congregationalists as “represent[ing] reforming liberalism” rather than a sympathy towards Labour or radical socialism (*EY*, 65).

Gilbert also stresses the strong association between the coal owners and nonconformity, which accounts in part for the less politicized atmosphere of the Nottinghamshire mining communities.<sup>45</sup> Eastwood was not an uncharacteristic example of the close relationship which built up between coal owners and their employees. In many mining communities, the owners were keen to ensure that they had a direct, personal involvement in their workers’ lives and welfare through building churches and houses and organizing sports: “the coal owner had a central position in local society, and the company influenced, sponsored, or controlled many local institutions,” which resulted in “the powerful conjunction of labour process, community relations, and deferential social status systems.”<sup>46</sup> This was particularly true of Eastwood, where the colliery company of Barber Walker was so dominant that Eastwood could be described as a “company village” (*CCE*, 31). Due to economic considerations, the company and its succession of managers ensured that their employees’ quality of living was comfortable: “... that particular type of nineteenth century paternalism which, based on the assumption of a common economic interest between master and man, believed that social investment made common sense” (*CCE*, 41).

This “prosperity, industrial harmony, company paternalism, and the willingness of the Liberals to meet the miners’ claims for parliamentary representation” meant that the Nottinghamshire Miners Association (NMA) were reluctant to affiliate to the Labour Party.<sup>47</sup> In fact, “There were few mining districts where the Labour Party made slower progress or encountered more opposition than Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. ... the

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<sup>45</sup> Gilbert, *Class, Community, and Collective Action*, 158.

<sup>46</sup> Gilbert, *Class, Community, and Collective Action*, 154-55. See also *CCE*, 34-35.

<sup>47</sup> Gregory, *The Miners in British Politics*, 145. See also Gilbert, *Class, Community, and Collective Action*, 171-75 and *CCE*, 31-41.

miners' unions had become so enmeshed with the Liberal Party" that for many years affiliation with the Labour Party, as was happening elsewhere, seemed unthinkable.<sup>48</sup> Even when the MFGB voted to affiliate to the Labour Party in 1909, political connections between the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire mining unions and the Liberal Party remained strong and difficult to break down; it was only in 1914, after a long series of electoral disputes, that the Derbyshire union severed its links with the Liberals and became completely affiliated to Labour.<sup>49</sup> These disputes demonstrated the importance of local ties and relationships, often outweighing orders from the Labour national executive; the transition from a grouping of local organizations and unions to a party organized on national grounds was a gradual process.

The NMA "had from its inception in 1881 followed a policy of cautious moderation" (*CCE*, 14-15); apart from the Great Lock-Out of 1893, strikes were local, isolated, and rarely antagonistic. This peaceful partnership between company and union lasted until 1907, when technological changes mixed with wage insecurity saw a five-year period of regional industrial unrest culminating in the nationwide strike of 1912, based on the demand for a National Minimum Wage. The NMA maintained its moderate stance during this strike, which was far more fiercely contested in South Wales. After five years of conflict, there was unease in Nottinghamshire at beginning the strike and widespread relief at ending it (see *CCE*, 72-73). The 1912 strike, and the divisions it provoked, is

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<sup>48</sup> Gregory, *The Miners in British Politics*, 144.

<sup>49</sup> In July, 1906, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) held a ballot on affiliation to the Labour Representation Committee: "Nationally, there was a majority of 9,492 against affiliating to the LRC (101,714 to 92,222); but in Nottinghamshire the majority against was overwhelming (9,741 to 1,671 ...)." Alan R. Griffin, *Mining in the East Midlands 1500-1947* (London: Frank Cass & Company, 1971), 199. One example of the ongoing relationship between both the NMA and the DMA and the Liberals is controversial NMA chairman, J. G. Hancock, who technically ran in 1909 as a Labour candidate and became MP for Mid-Derbyshire (due to no seats becoming available in Nottinghamshire), but retained strong Liberal tendencies, contacts, and support. See Gregory, *The Miners and British Politics*, 148-50 and Griffin, *Mining in the East Midlands*, 197-202. Gregory also relates the "Kenyon Affair," in which, as late as 1913, Barnet Kenyon tried to stand as a Labour candidate for Chesterfield while overtly maintaining his Liberal tendencies and contacts; Kenyon was strongly supported by local miners, unions, and Liberals, but was repudiated by Labour's national executive. He nevertheless won the seat by a majority of over 2,000 in 1913. See Gregory, 156-60.

recorded by Lawrence in his four short stories written at the time, to be discussed below (11.2).

Lawrence's upbringing needs to be understood in this context: that he was from a working-class mining family, but that that family was not especially poor. His town was part of a complex network of mining villages, with different religious, political, and social divisions, but all revolving around Nottingham. The subtle differences between towns were echoed in the internal family divisions between the proud miner and the proud housewife. These local and regional networks were directly incorporated into Lawrence's early fiction. In his early short stories, such as "The Miner at Home," he ties the local particularities to the national context. In *Sons and Lovers*, he changes the focus to individual experience, within the context of family conflict, labour organization, and the ambitions of class and social mobility. Local culture remains central to individual experience, but that experience is increasingly shaped by national developments in the labour movement and in emancipatory cultural movements.

### 3. Edwardian England

As recorded in Samuel Hynes's *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, the period from the 1890s to the First World War was one of great, though gradual, change. It saw the creation of the Labour Party and its first parliamentary representatives; the increasing influence of the trade union movement and the Fabian Society; the suffrage movement calling for the female vote and equal rights; more open expression of sexuality in art and literature; and greater exposure to European art in English cultural life. All these developments encountered considerable resistance. George Dangerfield's exhilarating, if overly sensational, account of the last years of Liberalism in *The Strange Death of Liberal England*

stressed the violent antagonism of the 1912 strikes, which according to his account came close to revolution. The suffrage movement splintered into the Suffragettes, a group which relied on violent confrontation to gain female emancipation. And much of the art of the period was brutally opposed: Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* burnt by the Bishop of Wakefield; libraries refusing to stock books; any mention of sex scandalous and wrong. It was not until November 1910 that contemporary European art forced its way into English thought with the postimpressionist exhibition. This famous exhibition, alongside the Futurist exhibition of 1912, saw the beginnings of modernism, which, with the brutal violence of the First World War, presaged the end of the long nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup> The period in which Lawrence was growing up was thus one of turbulent yet gradual change.

The new century saw widespread effort to study, change, and better the conditions of the working class in England. Seebohm Rowntree, motivated by religious sensibility rather than political zeal, studied the poor areas of York with the aim of bringing substandard conditions to the attention of the general public; *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* was published in 1901. This coincided with Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People of London*, begun in 1889 and completed in 1903. These two publications not only drew attention to the unacceptable levels of poverty in the country, but also changed public attitudes to that poverty: "the cause of this circumstance, Rowntree said flatly, was not drink or idleness or the irresponsibility of the poor," but insufficient wages.<sup>51</sup> There followed a series of publications designed to draw attention to working-class poverty, including the *Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission* by Fabians Beatrice and Sidney Webb (1909). This focus led to the Liberal government's People's Budget in 1909, which "declared, for the first time in British history, a government's willingness to use taxation

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<sup>50</sup> See Andrew Harrison, *D. H. Lawrence and Italian Futurism: A Study of Influence* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2003), for an account of the influence of Futurism on Lawrence.

<sup>51</sup> Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 55. The nature of sociological investigation into working-class poverty also changed, Rowntree's work "helping to detach British sociology from its earlier literary and journalistic affinities and move it towards the numerate austerities of 'social science', though without espousing unrealistic degrees of value freedom" (DNB).



as a means of redistributing wealth”; however, “it did not alter the condition of the poor, and the Edwardian Age ended with little social improvement accomplished. It had been more an Age of Reformers than an Age of Reform.”<sup>52</sup> This interest in and concern for the conditions of the working classes, coming to a head in 1909, coincided with Lawrence’s first encounter with Ford Madox Hueffer. (See below, II.I, p.38.)

These concerns also coincided with the rise of the Labour Party and socialist movement. The development of the movement into the Labour Party was gradual. In 1868, the first Trades Union Congress was held in Manchester; in 1893, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) was formed in Bradford; in 1900, the Labour Representation Committee was formed, which, in 1906, became the Labour Party, winning twenty-nine seats at the 1906 election. The socialist movement, even with the parliamentary success and representation of the Labour Party, was split into many different forms uneasily allied: trade unionism, the ILP, Marxist parties such as the Social Democratic Federation – often associated with unemployment movements and rallies which descended into violent encounters – the Fabian Society, and, although splintered again in many different directions, the suffrage movement.

The “issue” of women became of increasing concern from the 1890s onwards. The suffrage movement demanded the vote, but the social upheaval caused by the demand for female emancipation had far-reaching consequences: “it also involved legal, political, and economic issues, and touched on property ownership, the franchise, higher education, the birth rate, laws of marriage and divorce, the protocol of the court, and the future of the Empire – in short, on nearly every aspect of Edwardian society.”<sup>53</sup> The fight for sexual equality took place beside the struggle for class equality – seen most clearly in the work of the most interesting of the Pankhursts, Sylvia, in the East End slums.

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<sup>52</sup> Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, 55-56.

<sup>53</sup> Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, 172.

Lawrence was brought up in a period of great change, changes which shaped his emergence as a working-class writer. The political turbulence is not directly incorporated into his early fiction, but the issues of class equality, female emancipation, and artistic experimentation are at its heart. Lawrence's politics varied wildly throughout his life, but I here touch on his relationship with, and opinion of, the socialist and suffrage movements.

His distrust of socialism can be accounted for by his general dislike of mass movements, which aimed to represent the common good of the individual with broad brushstrokes. In writing about religion to his sister in 1911, his sceptical view of any political movement or philosophy is apparent: "taking no regard of the little individual, but taking regard for humanity" (*Letters*, i.256). His connection with socialism came through Willie and Sallie Hopkin, prominent local activists who hosted the Eastwood Debating Society, which, in a paper he delivered to the society on 19 March, 1908, Lawrence described as "meetings ... for discussing social problems with a view to advancing to a more perfect social state and to our fitting ourselves to be perfect citizens – communists – what not" (in *EY*, 178). The Eastwood Debating Society provided Lawrence, and other residents of Eastwood, with a forum for intellectual discussion outside the chapel. Thus, Lawrence's brief interest in socialism was part of his search for a replacement for the religion which he was slowly rejecting; in the words of Hopkin, "delving deeply into his mind and bringing up a strange mixture of ideas and beliefs" (*EY*, 178). Lawrence's rejection of religion, his movement in intellectual agnostic circles, and his reading of literary magazines brought him into contact with modern thinking. Lawrence subscribed to the *New Age*, a socialist weekly magazine, from 1908-1909 (see *EY*, 210), as well as reading the *English Review*, which Worthen describes as having "a strikingly left-wing bias" (*EY*, 216); both magazines alerted him to current trends in literary and intellectual circles from a left-wing perspective. But though Lawrence liked

the idea of coming up with systems and theories which would improve the lot of mankind, he did not maintain a serious interest in political movements or parties. Coming from a mining community and living in a period of national and international labour unrest, this is perhaps surprising, but reflects his emphasis throughout his work on personal experience over collective action.<sup>54</sup>

His opinion of the suffrage movement was uncertain. Lawrence wrote to Sallie Hopkin late in 1912, after the beginning of his affair with Frieda, that he aimed to “do my work for women, better than the suffrage” (*Letters*, i.490, December 1912). Before meeting Frieda Weekley, Lawrence was attracted to, and friends with, many women involved with the suffrage movement – Jessie Chambers, Louie Burrows, Alice Dax, Blanche Jennings, and Sallie Hopkin. He was at once sympathetic with and derisive towards their aims of intellectual and economic freedom. He considered that the suffrage movement would not win the intellectual liberation women desired – “as if any external power could give us the right to be ourselves.”<sup>55</sup> He believed firmly in an individual freedom won by and for the individual and that no national all-encompassing movement would be able to satisfy that desire. In 1908, he wrote of Alice Dax’s predilection for “sweeping general interests – in Woman, for instance, instead of in a woman and some women” (*Letters*, i.44, April 1908), showing his disdain for a movement which he considered generalized its followers as one common mass.

The woman suffragists, who are certainly the bravest, and, in the old sense, most heroic party amongst us, even they are content to fight the old battles on the old ground, to fight an old system of self-preservation to obtain a more advanced system of self-preservation.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Lawrence continued to correspond with both Willie and Sallie Hopkin throughout his life. See Lawrence’s letters to Willie Hopkin at the time; e.g. *Letters* i.176, in which he complains about having “lost touch altogether with the old ‘progressive’ clique: in Croydon the socialists are so stupid and the Fabians so flat.” See also *EY*, 178.

<sup>55</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 13.

<sup>56</sup> Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy*, 14.

Lawrence's portrayal of women in his fiction received short shrift from the feminists in the 1970s. Kate Millett's caustic summary of *Sons and Lovers* in *Sexual Politics* (1970) can be attributed to Lawrence's guarded dismissal of the suffrage movement: "the novel's real contrasts are between the older women like his mother, who know their place, and the newer breed, like his mistresses, who fail to discern it."<sup>57</sup> This simplification of Lawrence's presentation of his female characters should not be allowed to obscure his attitude towards the suffrage movement. He attended suffrage rallies and sympathized with its cause; it was the nature of a mass movement he was suspicious of. All of this is at the centre of *Sons and Lovers*, its young female characters – most notably Clara Dawes – are connected to the suffrage movement and directly involved in its debates and struggles. Although Millett was scathing of the way these characters and suffragism were represented in the novel, the portraits are far more ambiguous, challenging, and complex than she gives credit for. Lawrence's presentation of the role of women within a working-class community will be discussed below (III.4).

#### 4. Lawrence's Education

... he moved amongst the high things of culture with a tranquil assurance that no one trained like myself in the famous middle-class schools of the country either exhibited or desired.<sup>58</sup>

Some years ago a British Council critic described George Eliot, Hardy and Lawrence as 'our three great autodidacts'. It was one of the sharp revealing moments of English cultural history. For all three writers were interested in learning, and while they read a good deal for themselves were not without formal education. ... It is not only that by their contemporary standards these levels of formal education are high; it is also that they are higher, absolutely, than those of four out of five people in contemporary Britain.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1970), 252.

<sup>58</sup> Ford Madox Hueffer in Edward Nehls, *D.H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography: Volume One, 1885-1919* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), 116.

<sup>59</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, 170. Williams is referring to an article by Robert Liddell, in which he attacked Lawrence's cultural ignorance: "If we look at these great autodidacts, George Eliot, Hardy and Lawrence, we shall admit how much culture they gained, but we shall also admit that they lacked something which a more conventional education might have provided – the power (at least in youth) to wear their learning with grace and ease." Liddell then goes on to mock Lawrence's apparent misuse of the titles of baronet and dean and of Latin and French in *St. Maur*. Liddell, "Lawrence and Dr. Leavis," in *Essays in Criticism* 4:3, 322.

Raymond Williams was writing in 1973; although access to higher education has increased greatly since then, his observation is worth repeating. It is important to remember that Lawrence attended Nottingham High School and Nottingham University College and passed his teaching certificate. This was not the usual education of the son of a miner. Although his working-class background makes Lawrence unusual as a novelist, Lawrence's upbringing is equally made unusual by his education. Hueffer, misleadingly, described him alone as "justification of the [1870] Education Act."<sup>60</sup> The Act's main purpose was, for the first time, to formalize the concept of education as a public service; it did not extend "state responsibility" beyond "the basic task of combating illiteracy."<sup>61</sup> The 1902 Education Act was of greater significance, especially for Lawrence's teaching career, for it, "the changes that followed in the administration of local education, and in particular the increasing stress upon the training of teachers in undenominational colleges ... made teaching seem an eminently sensible choice" (*EY*, 112-13).

Lawrence attended Beauvale Board School for six months, aged just three; after a three-year gap, he returned there aged seven. Lawrence did not enjoy school, as he felt "roped in"; he described himself as like "the other boys" who "hated school because they felt captives there. They hated the masters because they felt them as jailers" (quoted in *EY*, 75). This dislike of school at first resulted in his "display[ing] no remarkable ability" (*EY*, 77), but by the end of his time there, he was considered as "outstanding" (*EY*, 80) and he studied for a scholarship to attend Nottingham High School. Lawrence's attendance at this school was highly unusual and had as much to do with his mother's "determination and self-sacrifice" (*EY*, 82) as with the 1870 Act. Between 1882 and 1899, only three miners' sons from Eastwood, including Lawrence, attended Nottingham High

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<sup>60</sup> Hueffer in Nehls, *Composite Biography: Volume One*, 116.

<sup>61</sup> Alan Palmer, *The Penguin Dictionary of Twentieth-Century History* (London: Penguin Books, Fifth Edition, 1999), 172.

School. It was an expensive, middle-class establishment, drawing mainly on the sons of clerks, cashiers, and managers, and Lawrence did not enjoy the experience (see *EY*, 84, 87).<sup>62</sup>

Lawrence's education marked him out as different from other miners' sons in Eastwood. For the first time, he had contact with boys from a different background: "He was mixing with the middle classes without actually rising into them" (*EY*, 84). This continued when he became a pupil teacher at a school in Eastwood, where he worked for three years (1902-1905). He had moved away from a possible mining career into a more respectable profession – though this was made inevitable after his illness with pneumonia at the end of 1901 after working for three months as a clerk – but he was still in Eastwood. He studied at Nottingham University, from 1906-1908, an experience he once again did not enjoy. He studied to take a teaching certificate, which would enable him to become a full-time teacher and leave Eastwood.

For much of his young life, teaching was the means of escaping his community: "The obvious career for him was schoolteaching, which ... Lawrence 'longed for'" (*EY*, 112). For much of his engagement to Louie Burrows, they considered setting up a small country school together. However, with his discouraging experiences at school and university, and a greater need to express himself through his writing, he began to move away from the idea of teaching: "I believe if I cared to talk education from behind the fence of an Arts degree I could soon get a soft job – well paid; but I can't do what I don't want to do. I shall try writing again ..." (*Letters*, i.88, November 1908). His two years working in Croydon completed the disillusion and dissatisfaction; writing was to be his vocation.

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<sup>62</sup> As Worthen points out, in *Sons and Lovers* Paul Morel actually receives a much inferior education than Lawrence did, spending the whole of his adult life in the book working as a clerk in the factory. Indeed, it was not until *The Rainbow* that Lawrence wrote about education in his fiction. (See *EY*, 89-94.) See below for a discussion of Paul Morel's education compared to Lawrence's (p. 71).

## II. The Development of Lawrence's Fiction

### 1. A Biographical Narrative

Lawrence's childhood and adolescence was difficult and unusual. Taking his mother's side in an antagonistic marriage made him vividly aware of family conflict and extremely self-conscious about being the son of a miner. His education made him different from other miners' sons in Eastwood, but it provided an avenue to only one particular career, teaching, which allowed him to move away from Eastwood and his family, to Croydon. There, he encountered urban poverty of a different nature from that of Eastwood and he realized that the hardships and limitations of teaching did not suit his imaginative and sensitive nature. His only other choice was to become a professional writer, a precarious career, a choice he did not make until 1912, four years after he had started teaching. In those four years Lawrence was transformed. The working-class adolescent hoping to break out into the lower middle class through a career as a teacher turned into the professional writer living abroad in Europe.

Lawrence found teaching in Croydon a brutal experience, emotionally and physically demanding; the sapping regimen of the education system that Lawrence encountered is recalled in Ursula Brangwen's experiences as a teacher in *The Rainbow*. But Lawrence's time in Croydon was significant. His bruising encounter with the education system made his determination to become a writer even stronger; it also enabled Lawrence to move away from Eastwood and the strong influence of his mother. From 1908 onwards, Lawrence began to detach himself from his family. Although his last family holiday was to the Isle of Wight in 1909, Lawrence also started to go on solo trips, for example to

Brighton in 1909 and to Blackpool in 1910. The latter trip saw him revelling in the loose, male environment of “the great roaring spangled beast”: “I rather look forward to escaping the annual feminine party this year. The old clique is broken: it will never be restored I expect” (*Letters*, i.172, July 1910).<sup>63</sup> His mother died four months later, on 9 December 1910.

Whilst teaching in Croydon, Lawrence also concentrated on his writing. He had been writing a book initially called “Laetitia” and then “Nethermere” since 1906, which eventually became *The White Peacock* (1911), a novel which, like *The Trespasser* (1912), is heavily indebted to George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. But Lawrence’s breakthrough as a writer came through the support of Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford), at the time the editor of the *English Review*, a literary magazine which he had established in 1908. Hueffer changed the direction Lawrence’s writing had been taking. He turned it away from the alien middle-class environment of *The White Peacock* and *The Trespasser* to a writing closely concerned with the mining community in which he had grown up.

In the *English Review*’s first editorial, Hueffer wrote of the importance of discovering “the knowledge of the lives and aspirations of the poor man,” complaining that “we have no records of his views in literature,” a vacuum Hueffer hoped to fill through the journal.<sup>64</sup> The attraction of the literary magazine to Lawrence and his friends, who read the *English Review* avidly, is therefore apparent.<sup>65</sup> In June 1909, Jessie Chambers sent, without Lawrence’s knowledge, some of his poems to Hueffer.<sup>66</sup> According to Hueffer’s

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<sup>63</sup> The description of Blackpool is taken from J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London: Heinemann, 1934), 263. Henceforth abbreviated *EJ*.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Janice Hubbard Harris, *The Short Fiction of D. H. Lawrence* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 26.

<sup>65</sup> See *Letters*, i.139: “It [the *English Review*] is very fine, and very ‘new’. There you will meet the new spirit at it’s (*sic*) best; and, if you belong to the NUT, you can get the *Review* at much reduced rates. It is the best possible way to get into touch with the new young school of realism ...” (to Louie Burrows, 17 October, 1909, around three months after Jessie Chambers sent Hueffer Lawrence’s poems). See also Jessie Chambers, *D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980 [1935]), 156.

<sup>66</sup> Chambers lists the poems she sent as including “Dreams Old and Nascent,” “Baby-Movements,” and “Discipline.” Chambers, *Personal Record*, 157. The poems are found in D. H. Lawrence, *Complete Poems*, eds. Vivian de Sola Pinto and F. Warren Roberts (London: Penguin Books, 1993 [1964]), 908, 916, and 929.



account, upon receiving Lawrence's poems Hueffer felt he had finally found the writer he had been looking for, someone able to provide the views and experiences of the poor working man in literature. For the first time, Hueffer thought, English literature would have a writer describing the "unvoiced and unknown" working classes from within.<sup>67</sup> It is surprising that, upon reading Lawrence's poems, Hueffer thought he had found a working-class writer. The poems in question are tender and intimate and reveal Lawrence's keen ability to describe nature, but they are not working class. "Baby-Movements" describes a baby in a garden playing with nature; there is no indication of who the baby's parents are or what kind of house the garden backs on to. In contrast to Hueffer's account, Lawrence did not at first seem the working-class writer Hueffer had been expecting and hoping for; this contradiction is due to Hueffer's confused recollection. He recalled that the first piece by Lawrence which he read was "Odour Of Chrysanthemums" and being struck by its keen description of ordinary details.<sup>68</sup> However, Lawrence did not write that story until after he had met Hueffer, revealing the influence Hueffer had on Lawrence's writing.

When Lawrence and Hueffer met, their views of Lawrence's literary career diverged quite sharply. Hueffer, preoccupied with giving a voice to the working class, believed that Lawrence should concentrate on writing about his community. Lawrence, however, wanted, according to Hueffer, to follow the tradition of writing about "something more romantic and with polished marble and gold and titled people."<sup>69</sup> When starting out as a young writer, Lawrence hoped and believed he would be able to make a living out of writing, a belief he continued to hold, for example beginning what became *The Rainbow* in the hope that it would be a "pot-boiler" (*Letters*, i.536). This ambition, both financial and literary, came from his mother's desire for him to move away from his father's mining

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<sup>67</sup> Hueffer in Nehls, *Composite Biography: Volume One*, 109.

<sup>68</sup> Hueffer in Nehls, *Composite Biography: Volume One*, 108-109.

<sup>69</sup> Hueffer in Nehls, *Composite Biography: Volume One*, 116.

community. Hueffer recalls meeting Lawrence for the first time and seeing the dream of “the hypnotic two thousand a year” that literature would yield him.<sup>70</sup> Ideally, writing for Lawrence would be a means of making money, satisfying his own literary ambitions and the non-literary dreams of his mother. When he met Hueffer, his mother was still alive. After she died, making money from writing became an obsession of necessity, rather than status.

Meeting Hueffer had a profound impact on Lawrence’s career. He immediately set to work on the first story to centre on his mining community, “Odour of Chrysanthemums,” and on the play *A Collier’s Friday Night*.<sup>71</sup> Worthen writes that, for the first time in Lawrence’s writing career, “they were drawn directly from the everyday life of the mining community, with the local dialect playing a significant part in both. Lawrence probably wrote them specifically because Hueffer suggested he should do something of the sort. ... This was the kind of work people expected from the son of a coal-miner, and it helped make Lawrence’s reputation” (*EY*, 217). However, these two works did not simply set in train the career of a working-class writer. Lawrence continued to work on “Laetitia”/“Nethermere,” publishing the book as *The White Peacock* in January 1911. As Worthen notes, “It was actually more natural for him in 1909 to write ‘Nethermere’ than ‘Odour of Chrysanthemums’” (*EY*, 218). Lawrence preferred to write about nature and the inner thoughts of intellectually self-conscious characters rather than his community, its labour politics, and the conflict and tensions of characters with different levels of education and self-awareness.

Thus, Lawrence set to work on “The Saga of Siegmund,” published as *The Trespasser* in May 1912. The novel was based on the diaries of Helen Corke, relating her affair with Herbert Macartney and his subsequent suicide. It is set almost exclusively on the Isle of

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<sup>70</sup> Hueffer in Nehls, *Composite Biography: Volume One*, 112.

<sup>71</sup> He had written versions of the play and story by December 1910 (see *EY*, 473); a revised version of “Odour of Chrysanthemums” appeared in the *English Review* in July 1911; and the final revised version in *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories* (1914).

Wight, which the Lawrence family had visited in August 1909. Rather than describing a working-class holiday, Lawrence focuses on the intimate relationship of two middle-class characters from London and their tragic difficulty of communication. In the many scenes by the Isle of Wight seaside, the language and sentiment of *The Trespasser* directly recall Hardy and his dramatic accounts of fated love beside the sea. In both *The White Peacock* and *The Trespasser*, Lawrence is determined to follow in the path of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy by writing about the inward sensations of doomed lovers to the backdrop of the English countryside. It is when he writes about his community that his work becomes far more interesting and complex.<sup>72</sup>

## 2. Four Mining Stories, 1912

In the period 1908-1912, Lawrence spent much of his time living away from Eastwood. In this period, he taught in Croydon, wrote two novels, published several stories and poems in the *English Review*, and had several unsuccessful sexual and romantic encounters. His mother died in December 1910. The stress and anxiety caused by his personal life and his teaching career led him to becoming seriously ill in December 1911. He found himself back in Eastwood, recuperating, and uncertain of his future. His engagement to Louie Burrows, which had been arranged partly to please his dying mother, ended in February 1912. His teaching career was now finished. Although he was a published writer, Lawrence “felt that his illness ... had ... precipitated him too quickly into being a full-time writer” (*EY*, 348).

Although leaving Eastwood had been vital for Lawrence’s development, returning there led to significant developments in the first few months of 1912: writing four stories

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<sup>72</sup> See Michael Bell, *D. H. Lawrence: Language and Being* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 13-36, for a consideration of *The White Peacock*’s and *The Trespasser*’s place in the development of Lawrence’s fiction.

(publishing one) inspired by the miners' strike of February-March 1912, breaking off his engagement to Louie Burrows, quitting his teaching job, making headway with his novel "Paul Morel," and meeting Frieda Weekley.

Until 1907 there had been little serious industrial unrest in the Nottinghamshire coalfields; any disputes had been isolated and quickly resolved. The years 1907-1912 saw serious conflict in Nottinghamshire, including Eastwood, due to several factors: the introduction in 1907 of technological changes such as mechanized coal cutting, the protracted affiliation of the NMA to the Labour Party in 1909, falling levels of coal production and subsequent declining wages throughout the period, felt most keenly in South Wales, which led the pressure to strike. This culminated in the National Minimum Wage strike which began on 27 February 1912, resulting in over a million men on strike and the closure of every colliery in the country.<sup>73</sup> According to Moore, the preceding four years of struggle had left the miners ill-equipped to "act effectively" in the national fight for a minimum wage (*CCE*, 72). Married to this conflict fatigue was an ambiguous view of the merits of the strike – characteristic of Nottinghamshire miners' lack of militancy – which held back many miners from committing to the strike whole-heartedly: "the men's attitude was one of resigned support" (*CCE*, 73). Most of the effort which united the community was put into maintaining enough relief for mining families financially distressed by the strike. Lawrence relates going "round with a friend delivering Relief tickets"; he viewed the miners he saw as "big, helpless, hopeless children" and the women suffering under a doomed resignation (*Letters*, i.380). After parliament passed the Minimum Wage Bill on 29 March, which satisfied some but not all of the miners' demands, the strike petered out at the beginning of April amidst resentment at union leaders; although there was a national vote on 1 April in favour of continuing the strike,

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<sup>73</sup> Griffin, *Mining in the East Midlands*, 195.

the margin was too narrow for it to be deemed worthwhile to do so.<sup>74</sup> The miners went back to work, feeling, as one miner put it, that “We came out for nothing, and we are going in for the same.”<sup>75</sup> Across the country and within Nottinghamshire, the strike benefited miners to considerably different degrees. South Wales miners received the greatest benefits from the strike and some Nottinghamshire miners (unskilled workers and day-wage men) benefited “slightly,” but overall, “most districts had been on strike for six weeks for ‘what was in reality next to nothing’.”<sup>76</sup>

The controversy and ill-feeling which the strike provoked are recalled in Lawrence’s letters at the time. At the beginning of the strike, Lawrence describes the men as “most of ’em highly rejoiced” (*Letters*, i.370). On 1 April, his father voted for a resumption of work; however “many of the men balloted ‘against’,” leaving his “two sisters raving” (*Letters*, i.379). Lawrence was excited by the strike, but not in favour of it; he declared at the onset of the strike, “I hope they’ll soon go back, that I do” (*Letters*, i.370) and on a daytrip to Worksop, he found, to his distress, the town and its pubs “snied with colliers” on strike (*Letters*, i.371).

Lawrence wrote to Edward Garnett, in a letter dated 12 February 1912, that a story he had just written, “the colliery one à propos the Strike, might go down” with one of the national newspapers – Lawrence suggested the *Saturday* [*Westminster Gazette*] or the *Nation* (*Letters*, i.366).<sup>77</sup> “The Miner at Home” was indeed soon published by the *Nation*, on 16 March 1912. Lawrence’s intention in writing at this time was twofold: “for the £ s d they’d bring” and because, in the words of Hueffer’s wife writing on her husband’s behalf, “they might ... take quite well, while collieries are in the air” (*Letters*, i.375 and

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<sup>74</sup> 244,011 for the strike, 201,013 against. The NMA also voted in favour of continuing the strike, but even more narrowly: 8,213 to 8,187 (Griffin, *Mining in the East Midlands*, 196).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Lawrence seems to have confused his dates at this point. His letter to Edward Garnett is dated 12 February but was probably written on 14 February (see note to the letter). Nevertheless he was writing at the point of crisis: strike notices were issued on 12-14 February, as in “The Miner at Home,” in which the strike notice is dated 14 February. D. H. Lawrence, *Love Among the Haystacks*, ed. John Worthen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 125.

381). “The Miner at Home” was written in February at the very moment the miners gave notice of the forthcoming strike and in the midst of national debate on whether to put the strike into effect, which induced the prime minister’s intervention on 20 February; the other three stories – “Her Turn,” “Strike-Pay,” and “A Sick Collier” – were written in March, in the middle of the strike, almost immediately after “The Miner at Home” was published.<sup>78</sup>

In *The White Peacock* and *The Trespasser*, Lawrence’s authorial voice is formal and descriptive, but in these stories the voice is closer to that of the miners’ he is describing. Lawrence allows the speech of the characters to stand unquestioned and there is an absence of the kind of commentary which had been present in his previous, and indeed returned in his later, work – they are “fiction not manifesto.”<sup>79</sup> This is also a distinction between the stories and *Sons and Lovers*; Harris comments on how in these short stories there is no equivalent of Lawrence and instead we hear the voices of “the farmers, the miners, and the poor.”<sup>80</sup> Lawrence’s confidence in using dialect and leaving dialogue unchallenged comes from the experience of writing “Odour of Chrysanthemums” and the plays.<sup>81</sup> The importance of the plays can be seen in particular; forced to allow dialogue to stand alone and unassisted, Lawrence realizes that the dramatic technique can be used in these stories as well. Thus the last two-thirds of “The Miner at Home” is mainly dialogue. Lawrence had found a new way of writing and a new subject matter – describing, using the language, and discussing the politics of, his community. Worthen also attributes Lawrence’s newfound ability and desire to write with detachment about his community to the death of his mother: the stories “are the first sign that he could

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<sup>78</sup> See *Letters*, i.375, in which Lawrence tells Edward Garnett of the “sketches” he is working on. “The Miner at Home” was published in *Nation* on 16 March 1912; “Her Turn” in the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* on 6 September 1913; “Strike-Pay” also in the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* on 13 September 1913; and “A Sick Collier” in the *New Statesman* also on 13 September 1913.

<sup>79</sup> Harris, *The Short Fiction of D. H. Lawrence*, 64.

<sup>80</sup> Harris, *The Short Fiction of D. H. Lawrence*, 30.

<sup>81</sup> At this point he had written *A Collier’s Friday Night* (November 1909), *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* (November 1910), and *The Merry-Go-Round* (December 1910). *The Daughter-in-Law*, with its striking similarities to *Sons and Lovers* was written by January 1913, just after he had completed the novel.

write about Arthur Lawrence's world without subjecting it to Lydia Lawrence's approval" (*EY*, 350). Free from that maternal influence, these stories are without narrative interference or personal introspection. The stories mark the point in Lawrence's writing when he was able to embrace the fictional representation of his (father's) community. This is the basis of *Sons and Lovers*, which attempts in longer, sustained form to achieve a balance between the personal and the social.

The power and success of the stories comes in large part from their topicality, providing a vivid snapshot of mining life during the strike. Lawrence had found an issue to write about and an audience to write for. Harris sees Lawrence delighting "in his ability to recreate for his new London readers a world so unfamiliar to them, so familiar to him."<sup>82</sup> Lawrence, for example, begins "The Miner at Home" directly and descriptively: "Like most colliers ..."<sup>83</sup> Immediately, the reader is introduced to the world of Nottinghamshire miners, with the implication that the character and household are characteristic of the region. The description of the household – the miner returning home from a day's work – continues, similar to many scenes in Lawrence's early mining fiction, describing the physical intimacy and tension between the husband and wife.

What makes "The Miner at Home" and the other stories written at this time different from *Sons and Lovers* and more topical to a contemporary audience is the discussion of local labour politics, viewed against the backdrop of trade union activity that was taking on an increasingly national dimension. Lawrence's style in presenting the discussion between the couple has no narrative involvement; he leaves the couple to counter each other without interruption. But it is also characteristic of the way in which Lawrence viewed labour politics – as a divide between the male miners and their wives at home. The conflict in the stories is not that of industrial dispute between the workers and their masters, but household dispute over money (and power). The broader issues are still

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<sup>82</sup> Harris, *The Short Fiction of D. H. Lawrence*, 65.

<sup>83</sup> Lawrence, *Love Among the Haystacks*, 123.

present however; the wife refers to two previous failed strikes and mentions the greater militancy of the Yorkshire and Welsh miners and there is a keen debate on the economic validity of the argument for a Minimum Wage.<sup>84</sup> In “Strike-Pay” there is also a rather hazy debate by the miners on international politics and miners striking in France and Germany; such debate causes a “wave of elation ... a thrill went through them as if an electric current passed.”<sup>85</sup> In the stories, the miners seem uncertain and unsure of their position; the stance of the women is presented in keener terms and felt more consistently. This recalls Lawrence’s description of the miners as “big, helpless, hopeless children,” with the women understanding the situation more clearly and more bitterly. Lawrence’s description could be seen as political, in that he views the miners as manipulated by the union leaders. However, it reveals Lawrence’s stronger interest in the political division between the miners and their wives. The miners are for striking, but they are acting collectively rather than individually, whereas the women are against strike and collective action in favour of financial stability at home.

The stories’ topicality gives them a greater urgency and immediacy than anything Lawrence had written before. “The Miner at Home,” for example, attempts to discuss even-handedly the issues that the national strike raised. Firmly grounded in the ongoing debates and arguments around the strike, it reveals how Lawrence wished to seize on the national debate to create a commercially successful narrative and that he realized he had “an audience waiting to receive it.”<sup>86</sup> The publication of the story immediately led him to write the three other stories, although they were not published until after the success of *Sons and Lovers* (in September 1913). Despite the delay in their publication, their topicality and immediacy is of great significance; in describing the forced indolence of the miners, their leisure pursuits, and their marital relationships and difficulties, Lawrence is

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<sup>84</sup> Lawrence, *Love Among the Haystacks*, 125.

<sup>85</sup> Lawrence, *Love Among the Haystacks*, 137.

<sup>86</sup> Harris, *The Short Fiction of D. H. Lawrence*, 64.



attempting to bring his community into his work, for both fictional and commercial reasons. With the miners' conflict strongly in the news, Lawrence realized that he could make money describing first-hand what was going on. But he had also realized that his community, writing about it in its own language, was a powerful source for his fiction – at this stage, he had been working on what became *Sons and Lovers* for a year and a half. The stories reveal his relatively new interest in writing about his class and community. They also demonstrate the importance he attached to attaining some commercial success for his fiction. They are therefore an important development in Lawrence's writing, helping him come to terms with his community. Yet in *Sons and Lovers* Lawrence does not explore further the national question of labour politics. Instead, *Sons and Lovers* is an uneasy rejection of art as commerce. It becomes a personal exploration of individual consciousness, more concerned with personal identity than with local, regional, or national identity. The conflict between individual identity and community nevertheless remains and is not entirely resolved, echoing Paul Morel's failure to give substance to his social position.

### 3. Writing *Sons and Lovers*

Lawrence began writing "Paul Morel," as *Sons and Lovers* was called for most of its gestation, in September or October 1910, less than three months before his mother died and around the time that three of his poems were published in the *English Review*. At this stage, he had had his story "A Prelude" published in the *Nottinghamshire Guardian* (7 December 1907, published under Jessie Chambers's name), a sequence of poems titled "A Still Afternoon" and the story he co-wrote with Louie Burrows, "Goose Fair," published in the *English Review* (November 1909 and February 1910). *The White Peacock* was published in January 1911 (for which he received £50); Lawrence received and

showed his mother his copy on 2 December 1910, a week before she died. Lawrence was by no means an established writer, but he was beginning to enjoy some success and could now envision a career as a writer. “Odour of Chrysanthemums” appeared in the *English Review* in June 1911 and he continued to write poems, stories, and reviews for the journal and other magazines such as the *Nation* and the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*.

Lawrence began “Paul Morel” on three separate occasions. The first attempt he abandoned after a hundred pages (see *Letters*, i.230); the second version was begun three months after his mother’s death (see *Letters*, i.237), an event which altered the nature of the novel: it “would ... concern itself with the worst aspects of the Morel marriage” and “do what other novels had never done: describe the complex pain and tragedy of a working-class marriage which had gone horribly wrong” (*EY*, 282). With the death of his mother, and the protracted illness which preceded it, Lawrence began to re-evaluate and decipher his parents’ marriage and his own relationship to his mother. The writing of *Sons and Lovers* allowed him to move away from the excessive intimacy of their relationship, but other factors also influenced the manner in which the novel developed and changed. When he began “Paul Morel” he was still a teacher in Croydon and his engagement to Louie Burrows began on 3 December 1910. Thus, all the way up to the third attempt to write “Paul Morel” he was still teaching and the need to support his engagement and planned marriage to Louie Burrows added a material impetus to his writing. Together they planned to set up a country school; these plans and his teaching were a distraction from the task of writing. If Lawrence were to write, he had to have some financial success in order to justify it to his fiancée; thus, Lawrence promised to write ten pages of “Paul Morel” a week and in his letters he keeps track of the novel’s progress to Louie (see *EY*, 297). But as the novel slowly progressed, these material claims fell away. The fictional impetus grew ever stronger and the novel became a vital method of working out the complexities of his family life. The material constraints Louie

placed on him held Lawrence back. He finished the engagement on 5 February 1912, just before he started writing the short stories about his community and just one month before he met Frieda Weekley.

Although back at the family home in Eastwood, writing about his family and community, Lawrence had no desire to remain there. In breaking off the engagement with Louie Burrows and then quitting his job in Croydon, Lawrence had severed his ties with the past. Lawrence was not yet an established writer earning enough money to allow him to concentrate solely on his writing. His family was putting great pressure on Lawrence to settle down into a secure career. Lawrence wished to travel abroad and as early as January had formed a plan to visit his uncle's relatives in Waldbröl near Cologne in April or May, with the justification to Louie that, "If I get a living knowledge of German and French, then any time, if necessary, I can go into Secondary teaching" (*Letters*, i.350, January 1912; see also *EY*, 372). His family then came up with the idea of Lawrence working at a German university and asked the professor at Nottingham University College, Ernest Weekley, whom Lawrence knew of but had never met, for advice. In March 1912 Lawrence reluctantly went to visit Ernest Weekley's house to discuss his prospects. At this lunch he met Weekley for the first and last time; he also met Weekley's wife Frieda and within two months the two were in Germany together.

This short half-hour meeting was enough to start their infamous romance. Their relationship developed quickly, perhaps more quickly for Lawrence than for Frieda. She had already had extramarital affairs, but she was also a mother who would not readily abandon her children. Lawrence met Frieda at a time in his life when he was desperate for change and for a new purpose to his life; possibly within three days of their meeting he told her that she was "the most wonderful woman in all of England" (*Letters*, i.376).

In May 1912, Lawrence was going to Germany to visit his “cousin” as he had planned at the beginning of the year.<sup>87</sup> At the same time, coincidentally, Frieda was going to Germany; so before going onwards to his uncle’s family in Waldbröl he stayed in a small village (near Metz) near Frieda’s home in order to be near to her as possible. There, unable to spend very much time with Frieda, Lawrence did what he never could when engaged to Louie Burrows: be foolishly impractical. He wrote to Ernest Weekley telling him of the affair (see *Letters*, i.392, 7 May 1912). The affair was thus out in the open; Lawrence had forced the issue and he and Frieda were a couple.

When Lawrence met Frieda Weekley, he had been working on “Paul Morel” for a year and a half and was on the third version of the novel. The chief reader of the novel had been Jessie Chambers; she corrected and commented on both the manuscripts of the second version (November 1911) and the third (end of March 1912). Her advice to Lawrence on reading the second version of “Paul Morel” was as pertinent as Hueffer’s had previously been. Feeling that “what had really happened was much more poignant and interesting than the situations he had invented,” she “suggested that he should write the story again, and keep it true to life.”<sup>88</sup> Chambers offered Lawrence advice often given to first-time novelists and which Hueffer had in effect also offered to Lawrence: “write about what you know.” Chambers’s advice caused her violent reaction to the third version; she “read it as history rather than fiction” and “almost exclusively as autobiographical writing.”<sup>89</sup> Lawrence had followed Chambers’ advice too well for her own liking in detailing the intimacies of their relationship. Reading it as history, Chambers was unable to appreciate Lawrence’s imaginative input. It was this third manuscript which severed their close relationship, but it also predated by only a month Lawrence’s trip to Germany and elopement with Frieda.

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<sup>87</sup> Actually his mother’s brother-in-law’s niece, Hannah Krenkow.

<sup>88</sup> Chambers, *A Personal Record*, 192.

<sup>89</sup> Helen and Carl Baron in D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, eds. Helen and Carl Baron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), xxxiv and xxxvi. Henceforth abbreviated *S&L*.

The development of “Paul Morel” into *Sons and Lovers* was furthered by the interjection of William Heinemann, who had published Lawrence’s first two novels. Heinemann’s reaction to the manuscript of the third version of “Paul Morel” (largely the same one Chambers had read) was almost wholly negative and he “declined” to publish it. He wrote to Lawrence that “as a whole [the novel] seems painfully mistaken, if for no other reason than that one has no sympathy for any character in the book”; he also found “the degradation of the mother ... almost inconceivable” (*Letters*, i.421n., 1 July 1912). This personal disappointment in the novel was matched with commercial disquiet: “its want of reticence makes it unfit, I fear, altogether for publication in England as things are” due to the “tyranny of the libraries” (*Letters*, i.421n.). Heinemann’s letter filled Lawrence with rage, although he admitted that “Heinemann, I can see, is quite right, as a business man” (*Letters*, i.422). Lawrence had admitted throughout writing “Paul Morel” that the novel would have difficulty in finding a readership; it was one reason he simultaneously wrote other novels, plays, and stories in the hope that they would be more accessible. When he began the second draft of the novel, he wrote to Helen Corke: “The British public will stone me if ever it catches sight” (*Letters*, i.239, 14 March 1911). Upon receiving Heinemann’s letter he wrote to Walter de la Mare that, “God helping me, my next novel will be of the ‘sweet’ order. I must live” (*Letters*, i.423). Heinemann’s rejection of the novel, together with Chambers’s admonition to make it more real, alerted Lawrence to its defects and the need to create a more balanced whole, with a more carefully constructed portrayal of his mother. The balance of the novel changed and his elder brother Ernest was introduced into the novel as William, providing an important balance to the novel. (The novel, with this added mother-son relationship, was only renamed *Sons and Lovers* in October 1912, just a month before Lawrence finished it.)

Lawrence began rewriting “Paul Morel” in August in Italy, with Frieda as his critical accomplice. The influence Frieda had on the finishing of *Sons and Lovers* was quite

different from the influence Jessie Chambers had had. Despite Frieda's assertion that they fought "like blazes over it," her reading of the novel was more detached and analytical. Chambers had hoped that in writing the novel, "Lawrence might free himself from his strange obsession with his mother."<sup>90</sup> Frieda was able to analyse this relationship and saw a "sort of Oedipus" element to Paul's relationship with his mother, channelling it into theoretical rather than personal terms (*Letters*, i.449, September 1912). On the other hand, Frieda brought personal experience to the novel. Like Clara Dawes, she had had extramarital affairs and like Mrs Morel, she was a mother. Lawrence, far away from Eastwood, his family, and his personal history, was more detached from the events he was describing and was able to finish the novel under the critical guidance of Frieda.<sup>91</sup>

In *Sons and Lovers*, there is a development from a realist description of a working-class community, which is similar to the short stories and plays he wrote at the same time, to a focus on the masculine apprenticeship of Paul Morel. This marks the shift from the commercial impulse which generated Lawrence's interest in writing about his community to a recognition of the artistic possibilities of using his community as a foundation for that exploration of individual consciousness. The balance between commercial and artistic impulses is one of the many conflicts within *Sons and Lovers* which gives it its intellectual vivacity.

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<sup>90</sup> Chambers, *A Personal Record*, 192.

<sup>91</sup> For discussion of Frieda's influence, see Helen and Carl Baron in *SC&L*, xlii-xliii and *ES*, 441-46.

### III. “The Colliery Novel”

#### 1. Critical Readings

Great critical emphasis has long been placed on the autobiographical nature of *Sons and Lovers* to the extent that this becomes its defining feature. Jessie Chambers was the first reader of the novel to advise Lawrence to “keep it true to life” and she was shocked by what she perceived as the non-fictional distortion of their relationship; indeed, Graham Hough (1956) deemed that “Lawrence probably thought he was telling the story [i.e. his and Jessie’s] as it was.”<sup>92</sup> This highlights the problem of reading Lawrence’s fiction as autobiography. Hough commented on the difficulty of separating Lawrence’s life from his fiction throughout his work, describing *Sons and Lovers* as “unique in being completely founded on his own experience,” but Hough also worried that “his whole *oeuvre* tends to be treated as disguised autobiography,” an emphasis which can lead to misreadings of his fictional texts.<sup>93</sup> In drawing upon the novel to recreate Lawrence’s upbringing, John Worthen in his biography (1991) advises caution: “Many things in the novel are not true of real life; many things from real life do not appear in the novel; and a novel – even an autobiographical one – is not an appropriate source for the events of real life” (*EY*, 10n.).

This caution should also be applied in judging the authenticity of Lawrence’s fiction. Raymond Williams (1970) saw Lawrence’s language as being at one with the novel’s characters and community in a way no other author had achieved, precisely because of his background. Although it was an imaginative recreation of his community, it was

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<sup>92</sup> Hough, *The Dark Sun*, 12.

<sup>93</sup> Hough, *The Dark Sun*, 12-13.

nevertheless a community in which he had grown up, meaning that Lawrence was able to share the experiences of his characters: “he is simply writing where he lived.”<sup>94</sup> Similarly, Julian Moynahan (1963) emphasized the historic, social, and industrial backdrop to the novel’s action, which resulted in “people so rooted in concrete social history, and in a region so completely rendered.”<sup>95</sup> These close readings of Lawrence’s work, foregrounding its regional and social authenticity, have been integral to the study of his fiction, but they prevent a critical detachment through the critics’ personal identification with Lawrence’s work. *Sons and Lovers* is a fictional rendering of his community and his experiences, and it must be treated as fiction, an intentionally imaginative recreation rather than a photographic image of his community. This is the dilemma in Lawrence’s work: *Sons and Lovers* is, for the first time, a novel by a working-class writer about a working-class community, yet Lawrence’s intention in writing the novel is artistic and individual rather than social or political. Nor was he writing in order to represent his class.

Graham Holderness (1982) has given the fullest and most theoretical analysis of *Sons and Lovers*. Following Lukács’s definition of realism, Holderness views *Sons and Lovers*, to a certain extent, as a realist novel: “the realism [of *Sons and Lovers*] seeks to unite internal and external, subjective and objective, personal and social, private and public, into a complex but cohesive totality.”<sup>96</sup> Holderness’s analysis of *Sons and Lovers*’s realism limits his interpretation of the novel. However, he also acknowledges the complications within that realist presentation. The social and cultural pressures of Eastwood made Lawrence “more separate and isolated” from his community, resulting in the conflict throughout

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<sup>94</sup> Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, 173.

<sup>95</sup> Moynahan, *The Deed of Life: The Novels and Tales of D.H. Lawrence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 20.

<sup>96</sup> Graham Holderness, *D.H. Lawrence: History, Ideology and Fiction* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan Humanities Press, 1982), 158.



his writing between “individualism” and “community.”<sup>97</sup> For Holderness, this conflict is played out most successfully and realistically in *Sons and Lovers*, but in an ultimately tragic manner: “an individualist ideology affirms the unlimited potentialities of the liberated self, but simultaneously a realist technique presses that affirmation to confess its true hopelessness, complicates the attempted resolution, and insists on the inevitably social nature of all human experience.”<sup>98</sup>

*Sons and Lovers* is a realist novel but it is also a portrait of internal development: the realist nature of *Sons and Lovers* is complicated by Lawrence’s focus on the individual and artistic development of Paul Morel and also by the Morel children’s attempted social mobility. Lawrence’s attitude to realism can be seen in remarks he made about Flaubert whilst he was writing *The Trespasser*. He predicted that, “those who belong to the accurate-impersonal school of Flaubert will flourish large shears over my head and crop my comb very close” (*Letters*, i.169). Lawrence also defined his style in opposition to Flaubert: “he [Hueffer] says prose *must* be impersonal, like Turguenev (*sic*) or Flaubert. I say no” (*Letters*, i.178). In steering away from a realist presentation of his community, Lawrence insisted on a personal, subjective presentation and style.

Hough sees the second half of the novel, which concentrates on Paul Morel, as “a deliberate means of exploring an experience that has not been fully understood.”<sup>99</sup> Hough does not blame the realist nature of *Sons and Lovers* for failing to liberate the individual self, as Holderness does, but instead perceives an artistic failure. Michael Bell (1991) goes further in examining this side of the novel. “*Sons and Lovers* was the first of Lawrence’s novels in which a motive of self-understanding became paramount” and in which “experience [was] re-created with an emotional participation so full as to seem

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<sup>97</sup> Holderness, *History, Ideology and Fiction*, 5.

<sup>98</sup> Holderness, *History, Ideology and Fiction*, 19.

<sup>99</sup> Hough, *The Dark Sun*, 42.

simply to yield the object itself.”<sup>100</sup> Rather than an autobiographical or realist exploration of Lawrence’s family and his community, *Sons and Lovers* is an exploration of his artistic personality and development, as channelled through the character of Paul Morel.

However, *Sons and Lovers* was Lawrence’s first major novel, in which he was still unsure of his own artistic motives. This results in the novel being “equivocally pre-emptive and defensive” with “a tendentious undertow of self-vindication” that is “too trammelled with personal motive.”<sup>101</sup> Although the imaginatively recreated community gives *Sons and Lovers* a realistic backdrop, the imbalance of the presentation of individual experiences, according to Bell, leads to an uneven novel.

The most severe denunciation of *Sons and Lovers* has come from Kate Millett (1970). Her feminist reading of Lawrence’s work has caused critics to treat his work more cautiously and with greater detachment than their precursors of the 1950s, such as Leavis, who were somewhat unquestioning in their praise of Lawrence’s achievement. Rather than admiring the presentation of Lawrence’s mining community in *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow*, and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Millett instead perceives a “disgust with the proletariat from whence he was saved by virtue of exceptional merit.” This disgust with the working class and with women, “who exist in Paul’s orbit and to cater to his needs,” results in “a faith in male supremacy.”<sup>102</sup> Whereas other critics such as Hough and Bell have commented on Paul Morel’s intellectual failure due to his “neurotic refusal of responsibility for his own experience,” Millett views Paul as a superego, with “rocklike self-sufficiency.”<sup>103</sup> Bell has since commented on the presentation of Jessie Chambers in *Sons and Lovers* as “an artistic self-betrayal,” but Millett had criticized the presentation of women in the novel in much starker terms, describing Paul at the end of the novel as

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<sup>100</sup> Bell, *The Language of Being*, 36 and 38.

<sup>101</sup> Bell, *The Language of Being*, 39-40.

<sup>102</sup> Millett, *Sexual Politics*, 244, 247, and 249.

<sup>103</sup> Hough, *The Dark Sun*, 51 and Millett, *Sexual Politics*, 250.

going onwards “to inherit the great masculine world which awaits him.”<sup>104</sup> Hilary Simpson (1982) has since presented a more judiciously objective account. In Lawrence’s sexual and feminist politics, she sees an emphasis on the personal rather than the collective.<sup>105</sup> This results in Paul Morel’s sexual relationships being presented in individual terms – and, with unbalanced consequences, the individual terms are Paul’s – which leads to Lawrence’s “failure to connect the personal world of individual development to the larger material forces which have a part in shaping it.”<sup>106</sup> Criticism of the novel has thus focused on the uncomfortable imbalance between the realist presentation of a mining community and the subjective internalized characterization.

In my reading of *Sons and Lovers*, I demonstrate how Lawrence attempts to create a personalized realism, in which he presents his community realistically yet through the subjective viewpoint of Paul Morel. I argue that Lawrence deliberately does not resolve the tension between realist objective description and Paul Morel’s subjectivity. I view *Sons and Lovers* as a challenge to individual consciousness to develop within the confines of both the traditions of a working-class community and the flux of industrial society. The commercial impulse behind writing *Sons and Lovers* leads Lawrence towards a positive resolution of that challenge, but the overriding artistic impulse makes failure inevitable. This failure enables, for Lawrence and subsequent writers, a deeper investigation into both English working-class culture and modern individual consciousness. As is common in Lawrence’s fiction, Lawrence leaves the novel open, a kind of failure, but a failure which will allow him to continue the investigation into tradition, community, and the individual in his next two novels, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*.

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<sup>104</sup> Bell, *The Language of Being*, 40 and Millett, *Sexual Politics*, 252.

<sup>105</sup> Hilary Simpson, *D. H. Lawrence and Feminism* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 25.

<sup>106</sup> Simpson, *D. H. Lawrence and Feminism*, 37.

## 2. The Physique of Class

*Sons and Lovers* moves away from the overtly political descriptions of the short stories. However, it follows on from the earlier stories in some important aspects. The first part of the novel is a vivid description of a mining town at the turn of the century, an industrial community moving into a national and international modernity. The novel also follows the stories and the plays in describing working-class family life and the conflicts between work and home, community and the individual. These themes are sustained throughout, but in the second part of *Sons and Lovers*, after the death of Paul's eldest brother, the novel concentrates on the sexual and intellectual development of Paul Morel. This development is confused by his mother's excessive reliance on him and by her relentless pressure to improve his social position. Paul Morel uses his sexual encounters with Miriam and Clara and the violent, physical encounters with Baxter Dawes as a means of assessing his emotional and intellectual development. He also uses his intimate relationship with his mother, in opposition to his antagonistic relationship to his father, to work out his social position. As part of a working-class family torn in two by an antagonistic marriage, Paul's position in the community is confused, a confusion which he spends the novel attempting to untangle. It is a confusion and a conflict caused by work, home, and community; country, town, and city; industrialism and individual consciousness. It is the extraordinary ambition of Paul Morel to resolve all of these conflicts; that he fails is both inevitable and desirable.

Two years after finishing *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence wrote to E. M. Forster that, "If I'm one of any lot, I'm one of the common people. But I feel as if I'd known all classes now, and so am free of all" (*Letters*, ii.265). This disingenuous declaration makes clear that one of the central concerns of *Sons and Lovers*, and one of the reasons for writing it, was to

investigate his class position and move away from the class confusion which his mother had instilled in him by creating such an antagonism to his father. Throughout the rest of his life Lawrence continued to portray and question his class background, suggesting that *Sons and Lovers* failed to resolve Lawrence's class dilemma. Writing it enabled him to move away from the oppressive influence of his mother, but he still remained unsure to which class he belonged, to which class he felt he belonged, and to which class he wished to belong.

The class unease which Paul Morel feels in the novel is often expressed in physical terms – his physical contact with his father and other miners; his sexual relationships, particularly with Clara Dawes; and his aggressive encounters with Baxter Dawes. The importance and nature of this physicality is defined by the type of working-class community which Paul Morel comes from. The peculiarly intimate physicality of miners, working together in close confines underground, has distinguished mining from other working-class professions, making touch, presence, and community of greater significance in work and family relations. Robert Kiely comments on how Walter Morel's masculinity is "rooted" in his class – but his class is also rooted in his masculinity, which depends on a physical, demonstrative intimacy.<sup>107</sup> The introduction of mechanized coal cutting reduced that intimacy, but in Nottinghamshire it was not brought in till 1907, before Lawrence was writing *Sons and Lovers* but after the period Lawrence describes in the novel (i.e. the 1890s and 1900s).<sup>108</sup> Working underground in hard physical labour made the miners and Lawrence feel that although they did not own the land, they belonged intimately to the earth.<sup>109</sup> However, Paul Delany has disputed the idealization of mining life that Lawrence believed in and which dominated perceptions of the mining

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<sup>107</sup> Robert Kiely, "Out on Strike: The Language and Power of the Working Class in Lawrence's Fiction," in *The Challenge of D. H. Lawrence*, eds. Michael Squires and Keith Cushman (Madison and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 91.

<sup>108</sup> See *Women in Love* for a clearer critique of the increased mechanization of British/Notts mining. See also Lawrence's paintings at the end of his life for a different type of portrayal of this physical intimacy.

<sup>109</sup> Kiely, "Out on Strike," in Squires and Cushman, *The Challenge of D. H. Lawrence*, 97.

industry until the miners' strike of the 1980s.<sup>110</sup> He rejects the idea of the mining community as a physically and politically intimate entity as a "myth," which he defines as "a cluster of popular responses: about the danger of mining, the solidarity of the workers, the insularity of their communities." This myth alters Lawrence's presentation of his father's mining community: his "personal experience caused him to assume that mining was as central to British culture generally as it was to him individually." Although Delany is sceptical of this myth, the perception was nevertheless a real one, "grounded on social fact."<sup>111</sup> In *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence portrays the miners, and the working classes in general (factory workers and farmers being the other main examples in the novel), as physically expressive, part of a tightly-knit community. Believing the myth also accounts for Paul Morel's uncomfortable relationship with his father's working-class community, viewing it uneasily as something to be idealized yet also shunned.

It is the family divide at home which initially causes Paul's class confusion. Delany relates that industry brought about a separation of work for men and women, which makes Walter Morel "a brutal domestic intruder." This results in the opposition in *Sons and Lovers* being between men and women rather than people and machinery.<sup>112</sup> This reflects the division Lawrence describes in the short stories of early 1912, but the relationship between the home and the industrial workplace is more complicated than Delany allows. Home and work continually interweave, influencing and defining the other. Although Delany's definition of Walter Morel as a domestic intruder is an accurate one, it omits the subtlety of the Morels' marital relationship which is based on that physical intimacy which Morel shares with his fellow workers.

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<sup>110</sup> This perception still continues, e.g. the British films *Brassed Off* (1996) and *Billy Elliot* (2000). See also *How Green Was My Valley* (1941) for an earlier cinematic example of the manner in which nostalgia mythically elevates the shared identity of a mining community in the midst of industrial hardship.

<sup>111</sup> Paul Delany, "Lawrence and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit," in Squires and Cushman, *The Challenge of D. H. Lawrence*, 78.

<sup>112</sup> Delany, "Lawrence and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit," in Squires and Cushman, *The Challenge of D. H. Lawrence*, 80.

The distance between Morel and his wife (and therefore Paul) is made apparent by Morel's physical bluster and earthy dialect. The dialect Morel uses is in direct contrast to the language of the rest of his family and complements his strong physicality. Morel's domestic intrusion is seen in the way he casually undresses in front of the fire before the gaze of his family, but it also reveals the familiarity he feels at home. The physical presence of the miner's naked, dirty and then newly-cleaned body in the small household creates a feeling of tense immediacy. Mrs Morel and Paul are annoyed by his blustering and earthy language, but she is also still attracted to the miner's "wonderfully young body, muscular, without any fat" with its "smooth and clear" skin, reminding her of an intimacy which causes her to lapse into dialect, calling her husband a "pulamiter" (*S&L*, 235-36). The mutual attraction which led to marriage is made apparent in scenes of such physical immediacy and brusque tenderness as this one, even though it is undermined by an emotional tension.

Paul Morel's class confusion is seen early on in the novel when he is forced every Friday to go to the pit to collect his father's wages. Paul's unease and discomfort in the presence of other miners is made plain, stemming from his antagonistic relationship with his father, but also from the physical presence and language of the miners in contrast to the "small and inadequate" child. His self-consciousness is both emotional and physical; his inner distress is reflected in his outer discomfort, squashed by the miners next to the scorching fire. In "suffering convulsions of self-consciousness" behind "the backs of the men" which "obliterated him" (*S&L*, 95), Paul is the effete, mothered young child in his father's world, aware of the division within him that is caused by his parents' marriage. "This ... new torture" leaves Paul unable to speak, voiceless as well as bodyless, made invisible by the crowd of miners in the room. Paul's invisibility is reflected by the dirt on the miners which makes him unable to recognize any of them, accentuating further the divide between Paul and the world of his father.

Paul's class confusion comes from physical differences, but is exaggerated further by the cultural and emotional differences which his mother has instilled in him. Paul feels this more acutely than any of his siblings, who have also in their turn all gone to the pit to collect their father's wages. Instead, Paul sides more fiercely with his mother in rebelling against his father's world. Moreover, Paul does not just feel different from the miners, but also from the clerks who distribute the wages and with whom he has actually to deal. Here, the antagonism is not physical, but linguistic: "They're hateful, and common, and hateful, they are, and I'm not going any more. Mr Braithwaite drops his 'h's', an' Mr Winterbottom says 'you was'" (*SeL*, 97).

As he grows older, however, he is attracted to the physical presence of the miners, in contrast to his own intellectual qualities, highlighting the uneasy division within his character. In trying to work out his class position, Paul expresses his confused notion of different class attributes, revealing the dilemma which is at the heart of the novel. He is split between the paternal, earthy and the maternal, cerebral influence. Being divided between these two stark positions forces him into a greater depth of self-analysis to work out on which side he stands – or how it is possible for him to remain in the middle. This self-analysis drives the novel towards its uncertain end. His tentative groping towards an answer indicates the nature of his failure to find a place within his community. In the following passage, Paul Morel attempts to work out what it means to be both working class and middle class.

"You know," he said to his mother, "I don't want to belong to the well-to-do middle class. I like my common people best. I belong to the common people."

"But if anyone else said so, my son, wouldn't you be in a tear. *You* know you consider yourself equal to any gentleman."

"In myself," he answered, "not in my class or my education or my manners. But in myself, I am."

"Very well then—why talk about the common people?"

"Because—the difference between people isn't in their class but in themselves.—Only from the middle classes, one gets ideas, and from the common people—life itself, warmth. You feel their hates and loves—"

"It's all very well, my boy—but then why don't you go and talk to your father's pals?"

"But they're rather different."

"Not at all. They're the common people. After all, whom do you mix with now, among the common people? Those that exchange ideas, like the middle classes. The rest don't interest you." (*SeL*, 298)



Paul is resisting his mother's influence – “She frankly *wanted* him to climb into the middle classes” (*S&L*, 299) – but he is unsure how to do so and why. Paul can never fully reject his father and his father's community, nor can he fully accept his mother's drive away from that community.

This division is also expressed physically. Clara Dawes notices that his hands, which “he had inherited from his mother,” had “a fineness of mould, so that his hands were small and vigorous” (*S&L*, 316). In contrast, Clara also notices that “his face was rough, with rough-hewn features, like the common people's” (*S&L*, 351). Lawrence uses Paul Morel's many physical encounters as a way of expressing further that emotional and social division which Paul feels deeply. This theme is expressed particularly in his sexual relationships with Miriam and Clara, particularly the latter, a working-class woman. Paul's first encounter with Clara outside the workplace is in her home, “on a mean little street” in Nottingham (*S&L*, 301). Here, Paul sees Clara and her mother working at home “carding lace,” in order to bring home extra money. They are working class in a different way from the Morels. Walter Morel's physicality is directly associated with the mines. His earthiness is capable of creating a warm, intimate environment at home. Clara, however, is seen in different physical terms. There is something demeaning about having to bring her work home and her physicality is consequently less sure than Morel's. Embarrassed by Paul's visit, she is flushed, her face a rich red. She works steadily as Paul “watched her all the time,” noticing that “her arms were creamy and full of life” and observing “her large, well-kept hands ... the arch of her neck ... the coil of dun hair ... her moving, gleaming arms” (*S&L*, 302). Clara's mother, in contrast, comments on the paleness of Paul's skin and offers him some stout to give him more colour. Victor Luftig, writing on what he perceives as the division between male and female labour in *Sons and Lovers*, comments that this scene “makes sexuality seem to inhere in her activity – Paul passively

observes it rather than projects it.” Luftig views labour relations as a sexual contest, in which “only men benefit.”<sup>113</sup> However, the most sexualized character in *Sons and Lovers* is Mr Morel, whose attraction is physical. This comes from the physicality of the male-only mining workplace, but it is also present in his family life. This physicality causes the division between himself and his wife, the division leading to a conflict which he loses in an emotional defeat at the hands of Mrs Morel and a physical defeat at the hands of Paul Morel. Here, the conflict echoes the division that Luftig perceives in the industrial workplace, but it occurs at home. As a battle fought in the home, it is one which Morel cannot win. However, this also leads to Paul’s insecurity and discomfort in the workplace, for he is caught between his parents.

In fact, the most strained workplace relationship is between Paul Morel and Baxter Dawes, a relationship based on a “peculiar feeling of intimacy” (*S&L*, 386). The encounters between Dawes, the emotionally depressed and insecure metal-worker/smith, and Paul, the young, intense, effete man who is his “superior employé at Jordan’s” and who is having an affair with his estranged wife, are highly significant in Paul’s development. The encounters demonstrate Paul’s unsure attempts to embrace his masculinity within a working-class context, echoing the physical intimacy of his relationship with Clara as well as the physical aggression of his relationship with his father. In uncomfortably asserting his working-class manliness, the confrontations once again reveal Paul trapped between two cultures.

The “Baxter Dawes” chapter is a series of physical confrontations between Paul and Baxter, mirroring his relationship with Clara and leading to their fight in the field in the absolute darkness of night. Here, in the abrupt divide between town and country, Paul, for one of the few moments in the novel, is able to reject all emotional and intellectual

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<sup>113</sup> Victor Luftig, *Seeing Together: Friendship Between the Sexes in English Writing, from Mill to Woolf* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 149 and 153.

sentiment and become “pure instinct, without reason or feeling” (*S&L*, 410). Instead, he is able to question and come to terms physically with his class and masculinity. The fight is confirmation of Paul’s cultural dislocation, for it emphasizes to him that “his life seemed unbalanced, as if it were going to smash into pieces” (*S&L*, 412). This physical metaphor stresses the sexual, cultural, and social dislocations under which Paul is straining and suffering. The fight, and his subsequent self-doubt and physical pain, highlights the ambiguity of Paul’s situation. His life is unbalanced, which means that Paul’s life lurches towards extremes or remains uneasily caught between opposing forces. One of the few moments of release, both physical and emotional, comes when he visits Blackpool for a few days. Free from the pressures of the opposing forces, he can allow himself to “simply enjoy” and to escape himself: “None of himself remained” (*S&L*, 413). In his letters and in the novel, Lawrence revels in the maleness of his trip to Blackpool. Paul Morel’s trip to “crowded, vulgar” Blackpool (*Letters*, i.175) in the novel indicates the final, ambiguous breakaway from the three women who have dominated his life – his mother, Miriam, and Clara – and who have symbolized the opposing forces that oppress Paul, leaving him free to express his working-class manliness. Paul is described as “having a good time, as young fellows will in a place like Blackpool” (*S&L*, 413) and this relish in such uncouth, uninhibited pleasures is one of the few occasions in the novel that Paul is entirely comfortable with his masculinity and with the company of other working-class men. The inner conflict between the intellectual middle-class Paul and the physical working-class Paul has still not been resolved, but the possibility of resolution remains.

In another seaside town, Skegness, away from the conflicts of Bestwood and Nottingham, Paul and Baxter engage in a complex truce, each acknowledging but at the same time fearing the other’s masculinity. Paul is “troubled” by Dawes’s “brown eyes ... pleading for re-assurance, for someone to re-establish the man in himself” (*S&L*, 446).

Paul emerges as that someone by downplaying his masculinity in a seaside hostel, leading to Dawes's mental, as well as physical, recovery in the return of his "triumphant male" (*S&L*, 447). Having embraced the working-class masculinity of the fight and of Blackpool, Paul is able, just, to accept Dawes's stronger, more physical presence. In conceding a kind of defeat to Dawes, Paul initiates the strange detachment from the emotional turmoil which dominates the novel. The battle with Dawes echoes that with both his father and his mother. He needs simultaneously to embrace and fight Dawes physically in order to come to terms with his working-class masculinity inherited from his father. But he cannot embrace Dawes fully, because of the influence of his mother. Through his encounters with Dawes, he is able to reject, but not fully understand, both of his parents and the class division within himself. This failure means that there is no final resolution at the end of the novel. This struggle also accounts for Paul's attempts to use women – as he also uses Baxter Dawes – to discover his social position.

Paul Morel's conflicts demonstrate Lawrence's interest in exploring the divisions in his community – between country, town, and city; between work and home; and between men and women. He explores these dislocations by an investigation into the social, cultural, and geographical formation of his community. He ties the development of his industrial community to the development of a modern, individual consciousness, which is seen in the contrast between working-class physicality and an aesthetic intellectualism. It is in Paul Morel's relationships with three different women that Lawrence explores these dislocations most thoroughly and complexly.

### 3. The Industrial Workscape

In *Sons and Lovers*, the mining community is presented in a realistic fashion. This presentation forms part of Lawrence's aim to present and represent his community to a middle-class readership, offering a picture of the community for outsiders to observe. However, this presentation is complicated by a series of factors. By focusing on William Morel's and then Paul Morel's attempted escape from the mining community and, in particular, Paul's internal self-development, Lawrence shows that his aim is to *present* his community more than to *represent* it. Furthermore, a negative view of his community is an inevitable consequence of the negative characterization of Mr Morel. Nor does Lawrence, as he had in the four mining stories, attempt to reveal, discuss, and analyse local (and national) labour and mining politics. There is a shift away from the commercially-inspired portrayal of his mining community in the stories towards a focus on the development of Paul Morel's intellectual and sexual personality, albeit in the midst of an industrial community.

Bestwood is a recreation and reconstruction of Eastwood; its inhabitants, culture, and industry are fictionally present within the novel. Throughout the novel, Lawrence makes clear the industrial workings of the community. The social structure of the town is described to make the community understandable to an alien reader. In this, he is following the established nineteenth-century forms of realism. But his main reason for registering the social structure is to give a feel both of the Morels' place in the town's hierarchy and of the nature of Mrs Morel's ambition for her sons: "The townlet contained nothing higher than the clergyman. Then came the bank-manager, then the doctors, then the tradespeople, and after that, the hosts of colliers. William began to consort with the sons of the chemist, the schoolmaster, and the tradesmen" (*S&L*, 73).

The Morel family experience is more important than the social structure of the town. Lawrence is explaining the working-class mining community to a reader to whom it may be alien in order to make clear the social environment in which Paul Morel's experiences occur.

Of the various professions that contribute to the industrial community of Bestwood, it is only "the hosts of colliers" who receive prolonged attention in *Sons and Lovers*.

Lawrence gives detailed descriptions of mining life, but these are coloured by the Morel family life and the antagonisms within it. Lawrence, for example, shows the collecting and dividing of wages on two separate occasions: first, in the pub (*S&L*, 94-96) and then in the Morel home (*S&L*, 234 ff.), echoing Lawrence's play *A Collier's Friday Night*. In precise detail, Lawrence ensures that the night's routine is made familiar to the reader: the women absenting themselves while the father washes himself, Mrs Morel's baking, the reckoning and counting out of the week's wages, and the weekly shopping. The after-hours routine of industrial labour is brought to the home; Paul only visits the pit to collect his father's wages and to tell his father of William's death. Mr Morel's accident at the pit is not a moment of gritty realism, but is included in the novel for the effect it has on the family life (*S&L*, 108 ff.). Rather than concentrating on giving a realist presentation of the mining community, Lawrence is more concerned with how that community affects the Morel family and the development of Paul Morel.

The Morel family home lies at the centre of the industrial workscape in the novel. It connects the mining town with the industrial city and the rural countryside. Morel brings, through his dirty body and his uncouth language, his workplace to the home – although he does not bring the home to his workplace. In contrast, Paul Morel brings his home to the Nottingham factory at which he works as a clerk – just as at home, he is attracted to the female, rather than the male, workers. But this affects the manner in which the family home connects to the industrial world. Mrs Morel wants her sons to make that

connection by branching out to “great centres of industry” (*S&L*, 127), whilst maintaining close links with the family home. However, this is an impossibility, for this also means maintaining a close link to Mr Morel’s mining community, to which the home belongs, despite Mrs Morel’s antagonism towards it. Lawrence’s negative portrayal of Mr Morel does not just cause an imbalanced presentation of the Morel marriage, it also makes a positive presentation of the mining community (and of industry in general) impossible. Personalized, subjective realism affects the seemingly objective realism that Lawrence uses to present the mining community. This becomes clearest in Paul Morel’s experiences in the industrial workplace.

Paul Delany, in his definition of what he terms the “industrial myth,” claims that, “Part of the myth ... is the miner’s sensitive son who becomes a teacher or writer.”<sup>114</sup> As Delany acknowledges, much of this myth is based on fact; D. H. Lawrence was indeed a “miner’s sensitive son” who became *both* a teacher and a writer. In *Sons and Lovers*, this artistic development is not described autobiographically. Lawrence worked for three months as a clerk in a surgical appliances factory; Paul Morel is a clerk for the entirety of the novel. Lawrence left Nottinghamshire to become a teacher in Croydon; after returning, he left again to live abroad as a writer. The only time Paul Morel leaves the area is for brief trips to the seaside. Paul Morel, like Lawrence, has artistic ambitions, but Paul is a painter rather than a writer (reflecting Lawrence’s early ambitions to paint) and, although he wins local competitions, does not achieve any major success. Paul Morel can be viewed as Lawrence’s vision of what he would have been had he remained a clerk or a teacher – a young artistic man stifled by intense relationships, work, and the region. This stifled career and social development also accounts for Paul’s stunted emotional self-development and understanding. Prevented from rising socially, professionally, or

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<sup>114</sup> Delany, “Lawrence and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit,” in Squires and Cushman, *The Challenge of D. H. Lawrence*, 78.

artistically, Paul's emotional development is forestalled, leaving him stranded between classes.

In the novel, the education that Paul Morel receives is of little significance and accounts for his feelings of restlessness and social worthlessness: "nothing he had was of any commercial value" (*S&L*, 113). "Quiet and not brilliant" (*S&L*, 142), he receives lessons in French, German, and mathematics from his clergyman godfather, Mr Heaton (*S&L*, 78, 113), but does not receive the formal education that Lawrence had had (Annie Morel teaches at the board school and Arthur Morel, like Lawrence, gains a scholarship to Nottingham High School [*S&L*, 142] – although he squanders his educational opportunities by joining the army). This leaves Paul uneasily positioned between different social levels. Not educated enough to go to university and gain a superior position as a teacher, which would propel him into the middle class, he cannot leave his social class or regional area. (Indeed, Mrs Morel, romantically but not practically, wants him to move into the middle classes by marrying a "lady" [*S&L*, 298].) But too physically weak to work as a miner (and too antagonistic towards his father to work in the pit offices), he cannot work in the Bestwood community. Yet the poverty of his family makes it "urgent ... that he should begin to earn" (*S&L*, 113). This financial imperative makes it impossible for him to pursue a career as a painter; a situation that Lawrence battled against, but a fight which is mainly dismissed by Paul Morel – "He would have liked to go on painting, but that never occurred to him, since it was impossible" (*S&L*, 113).

Paul's limited success as an amateur painter enables him to move out of his industrial community into the city, coinciding with the beginning of his affair with the metropolitan Clara. A landscape of his ("of a colliery at work" [*S&L*, 170]) is exhibited at Nottingham Castle and is bought for twenty guineas, the highpoint of his artistic success. Receiving support from Miss Jordan – the monied daughter of the factory owner – and being exhibited in the city moves Paul into a middle-class, artistic world, as has been his



mother's ambition. Paul's achievement is not seen as a personal one, but as a joint triumph for him and his mother. She excitedly declares to him, "Didn't I *say* we should do it? ... I knew we should do it" (*S&L*, 295-96; Lawrence's italics, my emphasis on "we"). Rather than confirmation of, or reward for, Paul's artistic abilities, the sale is a triumph for Mrs Morel's ambition. The material reward is emphasized over the artistic achievement, explaining why Paul fails to go on to greater success. There is no description of the landscape painting; instead Lawrence presents us with the material result – a small argument over how Paul and Mrs Morel will split the money. Mr Morel's reaction, although supposed to demonstrate the difference between him and his wife and son, is in actual fact equivalent to his wife's: "twenty guineas for a bit of paintin' as he knocked off in an hour or two—!" (*S&L*, 296). His reaction is one of material disbelief, his wife's of material pride.

Paul's artistic success is viewed in terms of material and social success. He dines at the homes of wealthy Nottingham dignitaries, wearing his brother's suit. His artistic success has briefly propelled him into a middle-class environment. This increases Paul's class confusion; it also undermines his artistic credibility, for he is forced to view his art in material terms. Paul encounters the same problem Lawrence faced – the conflict between artistic and financial ambition – but fails to resolve it. This is the significant difference between Paul Morel and D. H. Lawrence. Paul's painting is a superficial representation of his community; Lawrence's writing is an investigation and an exploration. Paul can only experience his class but not investigate it artistically.

Paul Morel's work and artistic experiences seem to conform to Delany's description of Lawrence as part of an anti-industrial tradition which viewed industry as "materialism without aim or limit."<sup>115</sup> Paul Morel's antagonism to industry is based precisely on those terms, for he views himself, rather self-pityingly, as "a prisoner of industrialism" (*S&L*,

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<sup>115</sup> Delany, "Lawrence and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit," in Squires and Cushman, *The Challenge of D. H. Lawrence*, 79.

114). Delany states that despite this antagonism to industry, “the novel as a whole does not show industry as closing off the development of those who take part in it,” referring as example to Paul Morel’s extended career as a clerk: “His [Lawrence’s] emotional development as student and teacher during this period is mapped onto the life of a factory clerk, with no obvious difficulty of fit. Despite his occupation, Paul Morel preserves his dignity and sensitivity . . . . As with Lawrence himself, Paul’s hostility to industry derives from cultural tradition rather than from direct perception of its malignancy.”<sup>116</sup> However, the professional careers of Lawrence and Paul do not compare and the disparity between them is the significant difference between Lawrence and his alter ego. The career Paul chooses is integral to his understanding of himself in class terms, just as Mr Morel’s class and masculinity is defined by his profession as a miner and butty. Paul’s disdain for industrialism reflects his distance from the working class but also his difficulty in rising into the middle class, which causes feelings of dislocation. In truth, he wishes to belong to an artistic class – jobless yet artistically productive – but does not have the financial resources to do so, a hindrance which Lawrence himself overcame.

The series of antagonisms and cultural dislocations explain Paul’s hostility to industrialism in clearer terms than the notion of a rural myth. Paul’s affinity with nature, which permeates the novel as a symbol of his artistic personality, is a result of his revolt from his father’s profession; and yet this affinity is also a result of his close identification with the personal intimacy of his father’s community with nature and the land. Paul’s attempts to bridge the divide between city, town, and country indicate his idealism. Instead of bringing country, town, and city together, Paul is pulled in three different directions, symbolizing his cultural dislocations and his failure to belong to one particular community.

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<sup>116</sup> Delany, “Lawrence and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit,” in Squires and Cushman, *The Challenge of D. H. Lawrence*, 81.

Lawrence's anti-industrialism, and its pressures on individual experience, is also evident in the earlier portrait of William Morel. His climb into a middle-class environment is more successful and immediate, yet causes greater physical suffering than it does Paul. Living in London, William becomes friends with "men who, in Bestwood, would have looked down on the unapproachable Bank Manager, and would merely have called indifferently on the Rector. ... He was indeed rather surprised at the ease with which he became a gentleman" (*S&L*, 115). This move to London results, however, in an even greater dislocation than Paul's, for it is regional as well as social and cultural.

William's rise and demise is a foretaste of the problems Paul will face in trying to break into a middle-class world. Pushed into an alien environment by his ambitious mother, he is forced to overwork, overspend, and overcompensate for his upbringing. This maternal drive is complicated by her resentment at her husband's profession. This complication, which she does not come to terms with, is pushed on to her sons, who have to work out their class and social positions through their career and through their parents' relationship.

Now she had two sons in the world. She could think of two places, great centres of industry, and feel that she had put a man into each of them, that these men would work out what *she* wanted; they were derived from her, they were of her, and their works also would be hers. (*S&L*, 127)

Industry makes "men" of the male characters, giving them purpose, security, and meaning, but it also makes these men unsure of their social standing. The sons' social position, defined through their jobs, is never stable because of their mother's dominant desire to see them advance above her husband's social position.

The unease of William's social rise is highlighted when his fiancée, Gyp, a girl of financial and social pretensions, visits the family home in Bestwood. The clash between the two cultures is sharp, emphasizing the dislocation that results from attempted social and geographical mobility. Visiting the home, his fiancée's confusion reveals the social divide between her and William's family and the difficulty, indeed impossibility, William

faces in trying to bridge that gap. She finds the family “clownish—in short, the working classes. How was she to adjust herself?” (*S&L*, 144); the problem of adjustment, however, is not hers, but her fiancé’s.

Mrs Morel’s disapproval of her son’s fiancée also highlights the contradiction in her maternal ambition; she wishes her sons to move socially upwards, find a fine career, and marry a lady, but the reality causes her discomfort and jealous resentment. She wants to like the attractive metropolitan modern girl, but is put off by the social distance between them.

William’s death is a consequence of his mother’s overriding ambition to see her sons advance socially. This ambition pushes him into a demanding lifestyle and into an engagement with a weak, flighty girl. Paul also falls ill soon after William’s death, again from the pressure of his work, which results in greater rather than less protectiveness from his mother. However, their illnesses are also a result of their attempts to negotiate the industrial workplace. Rather than industry being seen in unquestioningly negative terms, it is a complex agent of social change. Industry in the novel defines and limits social and sexual relationships. It provides the possibility of securing a stable class position, yet Paul’s experiences as a clerk at Jordan’s, although happy, increase that social confusion, especially in personal relationships. Paul’s entry into the industrial world does not enable him to come to terms with his class or his masculinity. “Paul liked the girls best” (*S&L*, 136); although he is an industrial worker, he is unable to become part of an industrial world. His uncomfortable relationship with Baxter Dawes is not just a result of his affair with Clara Dawes, it is also a result of Paul’s unease in the company of working-class men, who form a natural part of the industrial workforce.

#### 4. The Placing of Women

As noted above (III.1, p.57), the manner in which women are represented in *Sons and Lovers* has received particular criticism, most severely from Kate Millett. Because Paul Morel is the central character of the second part of the novel, around which all actions and characters revolve, there can be no balanced portrayal of each individual character. The novel changes from an account of a working-class marriage and a portrait of an industrial community into a novel of masculine apprenticeship, inevitably centred on Paul. The imbalance caused by this change in focus is seen most extremely in the representation of female characters.

However, this representation, particularly of Paul Morel's lovers Miriam Leivers and Clara Dawes, is more complex than either Millett or even Lawrence's more sympathetic critics such as Michael Bell allows. Just as with Paul, the characterization of the women is conditioned by their class. Miriam is of the rural, farming class; Clara of the metropolitan, industrial class. Miriam comes from a close-knit farming family and Paul's relationship with her is also a relationship with the farming family and the rural community. Clara, in contrast, is more experienced and independent, yet constrained by her financial needs and her marriage. Paul's relationships with the two women are dependent on the overarching relationship of their classes; the failure of the relationships is in part due to class division rather than "a faith in male supremacy."<sup>117</sup> Miriam's and Clara's different failure to attain equality with Paul is due more to the limitations placed by society on their gender – work, marriage, education – than limitations placed by Lawrence. In fact, Lawrence attempts to bring the novel's female characters into the community and the workplace far more than the contemporary labour movement, which aggressively sidelined the female workforce. As in the short stories, there is a conflict between women

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<sup>117</sup> Millett, *Sexual Politics*, 249.

and men, a conflict based on gender, sex, and work, but it is a conflict keenly fought by the novel's characters and intensely explained by Lawrence.

In Paul Morel's relationships with Miriam Leivers and Clara Dawes, he attempts, but fails, to challenge convention and tradition. This is part of the ongoing battle Paul is fighting in order to break free from the confines of family, class, and region which limit his social and intellectual mobility. Paul's struggle appears overemphasized in the novel, for this fight is, in part, waged against those who are confined by the extra limitation of their gender. In his relationships with Miriam and Clara, he insists on playing the intellectual lead, partly because this is in his nature but also because of an assumed gender superiority. Millett argues that *Sons and Lovers* confirms that superiority; I argue otherwise. It is important to remember that the novel knows things that Paul does not. Paul Morel's sexual relationships fail because he realizes that this superiority is false; the failure is also a result of his own inability to overcome social convention and attain a relationship based on gender equality.

In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams writes how Lawrence, like Eliot, Hardy, and Grassie Gibbon, avoids the "easy" temptation "to separate the country and the city" into opposites. Instead, Lawrence "insist[s] on the connections, and ... see[s] the transition itself as decisive, in a complex interaction and conflict of values." This transition is of particular interest to Lawrence because "he was on a cultural border ... not only between mine and farm but between both and the opening world of education and art," to which the city provides access.<sup>118</sup> The connection and divide between the country – rural and mining communities – and the city – advanced industry and culture – is a key theme in Lawrence's work which helps us understand the portrayal of women in *Sons and Lovers*.

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<sup>118</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, 264.

The intense overlapping relationships that Paul Morel has with three women – with his mother, with Miriam Leivers, and with Clara Dawes – symbolize these three social environments to which he is drawn. He fails to belong to one single community; he is instead attracted to three different communities: the city (Nottingham/Clara Dawes), the town (Eastwood/Mrs Morel), and the country (Hagg Farm/Miriam Leivers). The narrative drive of *Sons and Lovers* is Paul's attempt to escape from the dominating maternal influence, which by association means also an escape from the mining community of Eastwood. This is one of the causes of the conflict in Paul's character and ambition: his mother has forced the division between him and his father in order to instil an ambition in him to move into a middle-class environment. This ambition cannot allow him to remain in his mother's community, however, for she is not middle class: driving him away from his father's working-class community also means driving him away from her. Indeed, she has separated herself from her husband's community and, although she attends chapel and the Women's Cooperative Guild, she has not found a community to replace it. Paul therefore is unable to reject his mother's community; instead he has to go back to his father's in order to reject it fully *and* symbolically. He also has to work out why he needs to reject it and this he fails to do, for he is trapped in a circular web of paradoxes, of alternating rejection and acceptance of his parents' different cultures.

The first attempted rejection of his mother is in his relationship with Miriam. At first, Mrs Morel approves, for embracing the rural farming life of the Leivers also forms a rejection of Mr Morel's industrial community. However, this is not a simple divide between the country and the city, for the two are intrinsically connected. Paul spends the novel trying to understand that connection and division.

Paul's immersion in the Leivers's family and working life is a natural extension of his own family life, an extension in a maternal rather than a paternal direction. This affinity with the Leivers's way of life leads to his relationship with Miriam: "So it was in ... their

common feeling for some thing in nature, that their love started” (*S&L*, 179). This explains Mrs Morel’s eventual antagonism towards Miriam, for Paul’s love for Miriam is an extension of, and possible replacement of, his for his mother. The pleasure that Mrs Morel and Miriam take in nature attracts Paul to both of them, linking yet separating the two. Writing about *The Rainbow*, Williams describes “farming life” as “a metaphor ... for a particular kind of being: active, physical, unconscious: the body as opposed to the mind; inseparable from the processes of nature.”<sup>119</sup> Paul is attracted to that unconscious physicality that both Miriam and the countryside represent, but Miriam’s passionate feelings towards nature are also a metaphor for her possessive intensity towards Paul. She identifies too closely, too personally, and too physically with nature; Paul, however, is able to break away from that identification by moving to the industrial city and beginning an affair with a working-class metropolitan woman.

Miriam’s intense identification with nature is replaced by Clara Dawes’s metropolitanism. Clara is “impassive” towards “the country which was forbidden her”; at the same time, “she loathed the town,” viewing it as “a *little* sore upon the country” (*S&L*, 313). Unlike Paul, Clara is unable to connect the two; nor, as someone brought up in a poor part of Nottingham, is she able to appreciate the man-made industrial beauty and modernity of the city. However, Paul can, for he is positioned between the country and the city. By conducting their affair in the environs of Nottingham, on the boundary between country and city, Paul is showing how he, as a working-class aesthete, bridges the divide between the country and the city. However, Clara, unlike Paul, actually is “a prisoner of industrialism”; her escape from industry can only be temporary. When they go to the seaside it can be only for a holiday and this exposes the uncertainty of their affair. It is a temporary escape to a part of nature that neither of them belongs to.

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<sup>119</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, 265.



Towards the end of their relationship, Paul and Clara go to the sea together. Rather than a celebration of the spectacular scenery, it is an intimate collaboration with “the far, desolate reaches” under “the grey of the dawn” and “the wan moon” (*S&L*, 400). Alone and near-naked in the cold morning light, this intimacy also highlights the reversal of their gender roles. Paul “loved the Lincolnshire coast and she loved the sea.” Paul is physically weak, in communion emotionally and aesthetically with the seaside beauty. Clara, on the other hand, is physically strong and celebrates the sea’s beauty by aggressively bathing in it, immersing herself in its bracing cold. This distance between them, an echo of the much more tortured distance between Paul and Miriam, is seen in his “detached, hard and elemental” kisses (*S&L*, 403) and leads eventually to the engineered reunion of Clara and Baxter, which also takes place by the Lincolnshire seaside.

The simultaneous connection between nature and industry is made even closer by Paul and Clara’s adventure in the Grove (*S&L*, 352 ff.). The park is part of the city, but it is also wild and muddy. It looks upon the city, but it is a place to hide from the city’s industrialism. Paul and Clara go to the park in the same way that Paul and Miriam communed with nature, but here nature is in opposition to them. It frightens and dirties them and exposes the secrecy at the heart of their relationship. Their flirtation with nature is shameful and concealed; they dirty their clothes and have to clean them before returning to the city. Paul, with an unconscious irony, asks, “Aren’t I a great hand at restoring you to respectability?” (*S&L*, 356). It is he who takes Clara away from the respectability of marriage – symbolized by their trips to the seaside and Nottingham parks – but also, through his relationship with Baxter, it is Paul who, with an uncertain and undermined chauvinism, takes her back to that respectability.

The more troubling relationship of the two is with Miriam, for Paul uses her in order to realize himself. It is a relationship based on a selfish attempt at self-understanding and

-development. Paul's failure becomes more than a personal failure; it, wilfully, claims a victim. Paul unfairly takes advantage of the inequality, based on gender, of their relationship and punishes Miriam for her inability to assert her own personality. This inability lies in her insistence – as Paul sees it – on viewing herself as “a sacrifice” to him and their love for each other (*S&L*, 255). However, to insist on Miriam being a victim is to follow Paul's reading and to deny the complexities of her character.

In fact, Miriam continually asserts her personality, if only within the boundaries of her relationship with Paul. The scenes between Paul and Miriam are an intellectual dialogue, in which both attempt to work out their position in a changing class, cultural, and industrial environment. *Both* fail in this attempt, for neither is able to view their relationship outside the tradition of marriage which they feel obliged to uphold. The family pressure to marry is felt but resented – “Miriam was indignant at anybody's forcing the issues between them” (*S&L*, 264). This fight against convention is conducted on their own unsure, personal terms which leads to a fight against themselves. There is in actual fact an intellectual honesty in these two simultaneous battles. Both Paul and Miriam wish to remain true to each other and to the basis of their relationship, despite the hurt it causes:

“Do you think we love each other enough to marry?” he asked, definitely. It made her tremble.

“No,” she answered, truthfully. “I don't think so—we're too young.”

“I thought perhaps,” he went on miserably, “that you, with your intensity in things, might have given me more—than I could ever make up to you.—And even now—if you think it better—we'll be engaged.”

Now Miriam wanted to cry. And she was angry too. He was always such a child, for people to do as they liked with.

“No, I don't think so,” she said firmly.

“You see,” he said, “with me—I don't think one person would ever monopolise me—be everything to me—I think never.”

This she did not consider.

“No,” she murmured. (*S&L*, 264-65)

This failure is *more* Paul's responsibility, as he is the instigator of the complex dialogue which describes and limits their relationship; however, the result is the same for both, for

they are both cut adrift, unsure how to cope in the new, modern culture, which holds the possibility of liberation from traditional values.

This failure leads Paul into a relationship with a woman with whom marriage is impossible. Clara Dawes is quite different from Miriam; Miriam's innocence is replaced by Clara's experience, her intensity by detachment, and her rural affinity with nature with an industrial outlook which views the countryside as alien. Paul's view of Clara's austere feminism, which at first overlooks her economic vulnerability, reveals the ambivalent nature of his attitude to women. His first sight of her is described in terms which emphasize at once her masculinity and femininity. She coolly shakes hands with him, but "he noticed how her breasts swelled inside her blouse, and how her shoulder curved handsomely under the thin muslin at the top of her arm" (*S&L*, 269-70). Clara's appearance is emphasized more than any other of the novel's characters, in terms which are close to condescending, but which also make clear the difference between the suffragist Clara who wishes to maintain her independence and the working-class woman who is forced to work in an unsatisfying job for a living. In describing her appearance, her femininity is emphasized and her independence undermined; but such descriptions also highlight the difference between the private and the public individual:

Out-doors she dressed very plainly, down to ugliness. Indoors she always looked nice. She walked with hesitating steps alongside Paul, bowing and turning away from him. Dowdy in dress, and drooping, she showed to great disadvantage. He could scarcely recognise her strong form, that seemed to slumber with power. She appeared almost insignificant, drowning her stature in her stoop, as she shrank from the public gaze. (*S&L*, 313)

Here, it is the masculine community which undermines Clara's independence, not the overwrought self-questioning of Paul Morel. The split in Clara's personality highlights the ambiguity with which Paul views Clara and women in general. Clara is a committed suffragist, which Paul respects but also mocks. The potential power of female emancipation makes his insecure social position yet more unsure.

The female characters in *Sons and Lovers* mark the class and cultural divisions that cause the split in Paul Morel's personality and the difficulty in his social advancement. His inability to turn the relationships into something permanent demonstrates his personal failure to construct a solid social position for himself. It also demonstrates how the social conventions of class, community, and workplace limit the ambitions of the novel's characters. All three women, Mrs Morel, Miriam Leivers, and Clara Dawes believe in class and gender emancipation, but are unable to achieve it. Paul shares their belief, but as his position is potentially more powerful, his failure is the greater.

## 5. Conclusion

By focusing so intensely and urgently on the conflicts caused by class, gender, and tradition, *Sons and Lovers* maintains a balance between the internal conflict of Paul Morel and the external conflicts of gender, class, and community. The series of cultural dislocations which *Sons and Lovers* explores remains unconnected at the novel's end as Paul Morel's continued attempts to resolve a series of social, cultural, and personal conflicts fail. However, these attempts allow Lawrence to explore the development of an individual consciousness in both an industrial context and at the onset of modernity, an exploration which he takes further in *The Rainbow*. He subtly describes the social change of the period in detailing the Morel children's social and regional mobility, educational opportunities, and sexual, political, and linguistic emancipation. At the same time, he moves on from nineteenth-century social realism by focusing on the aesthetic, intellectual individual over the politicized representation of a working-class community.

Graham Holderness states that at the end of the novel, "Paul walks back – towards the town; back towards relationships, interdependence, social connection; back towards

the community in which alone human life can have meaning and reality.”<sup>120</sup> This overly optimistic reading results from Holderness’s determination to read *Sons and Lovers* as a successfully realist novel. Kate Millett’s equally unnuanced reading results instead from her polemical feminism; she finds Paul Morel in “brilliant condition,” having “disposed of ... his women.”<sup>121</sup> These readings fail to accept that in modernist literature, a clean, successful ending is unnecessary and undesired. Lawrence deliberately prevents Paul Morel from resolving the conflicts that arise from his class, intellectual, and sexual confusion; it is that failure which enables Lawrence’s deep explorations of both community and individual. Michael Bell sees a “broaden[ed] implication” in “Paul Morel’s ‘failure’ with two quite different women.”<sup>122</sup> It is this failure which enables *Sons and Lovers* to succeed and Lawrence to continue his investigation into community, individuality, and modernity in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*.

At the end of his life, in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, in his paintings, and in his autobiographical sketches, Lawrence returned to the mining environment which had inspired his first major work of fiction. He realized that the writing of *Sons and Lovers* had inspired a new working-class tradition, which he wished to develop. In 1927, “pitman poet” and adult educationalist Charles Wilson wrote to Lawrence – and also, later on, James Joyce and Aldous Huxley – inviting him to visit miners’ reading groups in the north east of England. Lawrence’s reply indicates the relationship he felt he had with working-class writers and readers:

I believe myself the miners who want to read anything would probably read me, if ever they got started. I’m a miner’s son myself, so surely there’s some sympathy.

But try them with *Sons and Lovers*, and some stories from *The Prussian Officer* – and perhaps that play which Duckworth publishes: *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd*.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Holderness, *History, Ideology and Fiction*, 158.

<sup>121</sup> Millett, *Sexual Politics*, 257.

<sup>122</sup> Bell, *The Language of Being*, 37.

<sup>123</sup> *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence: Volume 6*, eds. James T. Boulton and Margaret H. Boulton, with Gerald M. Lacy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 229.

For writers in the late 1920s and 1930s, “there was no readily available, familiar, *native, national* working-class tradition to which they could see themselves belonging. All they had was D. H. Lawrence.”<sup>124</sup> In *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence unconsciously forges that new tradition of working-class fiction. Andy Croft outlines how Lawrence’s work influenced and inspired a new generation of writers in the 1930s and how the essential working-class elements of *Sons and Lovers* are maintained in their work: their novels’ “structure was provided by autobiography and ... drama ... by historical events.”<sup>125</sup> The writers continue to focus on the intellectual development of a working-class male in an industrial environment, which conditions and limits that development. This intellectual conflict is echoed in the conflict between the industrial city and the surrounding rural areas. By moving away from political impulses to an emphasis on artistic and intellectual concerns, Lawrence provided the basis for a non-politicized English working-class fiction. Writers in the 1930s had greater difficulty than Lawrence in shaking off the political impulse behind working-class fiction, but *Sons and Lovers* enabled them to write *of* – not *for* – their class.

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<sup>124</sup> Croft, *Red Letter Days*, 67.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER TWO

### **PALATABLE SOCIALISM OR “THE REAL THING”? WALTER GREENWOOD’S *LOVE ON THE DOLE***

# I. Historical Contexts

## 1. Introduction

“*Love on the Dole* is the real thing,” wrote Iris Barry in the *Herald Tribune* (26 August, 1934).<sup>126</sup> The *Sunday Chronicle* declared that it was “a faithful representation of the life of the unemployed ... . I believe it ... . It is dispassionately true” (3 August, 1933).

Reviewers were uniform in their praise of the novel. All were agreed that it was a fine novel, “but it is in its qualities as a ‘social document’ that its value lies” (*Times Literary Supplement*, 29 June, 1933).

The metropolitan media were angered by the squalor and social justice it vividly describes, feeling that “a book of this kind should do more to stir the public conscience about the evils of the slums than any number of technical treatises on housing and unemployment” (*Daily Telegraph*, 20 June, 1933). However, they were not affronted by it. *New Britain* decided that, “There is no propaganda in his work,” and *John O’London’s Weekly* were pleased that it was not “the thin disguise of propaganda” (dates unknown).

Local newspaper reviewers were equally convinced by the novel. The *Manchester Evening Chronicle* called it “an authentic story of squalor and misery” which was “both fierce and depressing in its truth” (19 June, 1933). Many reviewers were impressed that Greenwood had been on the dole himself, adding a further layer of authenticity to the novel. The *Manchester Evening Chronicle* declared that, “It is obvious that Mr Greenwood has lived the life,” melodramatically concluding that “torn fingers have not written this book, it is his heart that has bled.”

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<sup>126</sup> All newspaper reviews: Newspaper Cuttings. Walter Greenwood Collection. WGP/3. University of Salford Library.



U.S. reviewers were also affected by the fictional report of the state of England. Both the *San Francisco Examiner* and the *New York Times* compared it to another description of England: “Coming hard on the heels of J. B. Priestley’s alarming *English Journey*, Greenwood’s book should be read as a terrible commentary on working conditions in the English Midlands” (*New York Times*, date unknown). Despite the reviewer’s geographical slip, the reviews in the United States generally reflected those in Britain, both the *San Francisco Examiner* and *Nation* (New York) calling it “honest.” The American reviewers also compare Greenwood to other writers to place him in an international context of left-leaning literary protest. The *New York Sun* compares *Love on the Dole* to *Fontamara*, the anti-fascist novel by Ignazio Silone, which also came out in 1933. The *San Francisco Examiner* makes the comparison with Dickens, emphasizing the authenticity of Greenwood’s account over Dickens’s: “If Charles Dickens had known as much about the industrial system as Walter Greenwood does ... the author of *Oliver Twist* (*sic*) would probably have produced a novel of protest something like Walter Greenwood’s story” (13 September, 1934).

Greenwood had awakened the reviewers’ slumbering social conscience without preaching or pointing any fingers. However, it was not only conservative newspapers which responded positively. The socialist *New Clarion* called it “the most damning indictment of this Government that I have yet read,” emphasizing that the novel was “facts, facts, facts, all the way. ... I commend this book to you as a novel and as modern history. It is a fine piece of work which no Socialist should overlook” (8 July, 1933).” The Marxist *Plebs* decided it was “a perfect authentic picture, as detailed as a Dutch painting, of life as it is lived by millions in the industrial North to-day” (date unknown).

Over the course of ten years, through various media, *Love on the Dole* reached a wide-ranging audience, which responded to the degrading poverty it was describing and wishing to change. The novel was adapted into a play and staged in Manchester, Paris,

New York, and London, suggesting that the audience of *Love on the Dole*, both novel and play, were middle-class observers enjoying the drama whilst having their social consciences tapped and roused. The novel's and play's apparent lack of political propaganda appeased the authorities and reviewers, who could view it as an accurate social document and it passed without censure or censorship. The play ran for 391 performances in the West End, thus attracting, "fully one million people ... before the end of 1935", including George Orwell and MP Sir Herbert Samuel, who drew the play, and the issues it raised, to Parliament's attention."<sup>127</sup> The novel was eventually made into a successful film version during the Second World War, motivated by a different form of propaganda.

The novel's success with American reviewers draws attention to why a novel about local issues, firmly embedded in its own closed community, managed to provoke national and international responses. *Love on the Dole* was written about a working-class community by a working-class writer, but found its greatest success amongst middle-class London-based readers – journalists and politicians in particular. This reflects the close network of regional, national, and international politics and crises of the period. It also demonstrates how Greenwood used his local community to highlight the effects of an international crisis. The novel was at the centre of the development in the late 1920s and 1930s of working-class writing and of interest in working-class life, both closely related to the problem of mass unemployment. Its success conditioned the character of that writing and also made clear the nature of the interest taken in the working class during the 1930s. It feeds that interest by describing first hand the life of a working-class community, but its success amongst metropolitan audiences deliberately dilutes its socialist propaganda. Its appeal is to a middle-class readership, conservative but paternalistic in outlook. Like Priestley's *English Journey* (1934), *Love on the Dole* is attuned to the sensibilities of its

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<sup>127</sup> Stephen Constantine, "Love on the Dole and Its Reception" in *Literature and History* 8:2 (1982), 233-34.

influential readership. Careful not to offend those sensibilities, the novel steers clear of socialist propaganda. Nor does Greenwood confuse the novel's polemic with obstinate adherence to socialist ideology. Greenwood's aim is to represent his class to another, more powerful, though conservative, class rather than to a socialist élite already aware of the issues the novel describes. This results in a novel partially wishing to conform to socialist ideas on how best to represent the working class, but at the same time aiming to present a faithful and politically powerful portrait of his own community to a sympathetic metropolitan audience.

Scholarly criticism of *Love on the Dole* has focused on the novel's historical and political aspects, particularly in the context of the early 1930s unemployment crisis. Although some more recent criticism has examined the novel's ironic treatment of romantic and literary themes, its uneven narrative tone, or as a study of working-class sexuality, it is the analyses of the novel's politics that concern me most here.<sup>128</sup> Stephen Constantine, in still the most important article to date on *Love on the Dole*, has argued that Greenwood was writing directly for a middle-class readership and that this targeted audience made Greenwood limit the socialist politics of the novel. Constantine feels that Greenwood, unwilling to attack his potential middle-class readership, "has very little to say about the causes of their [the characters'] difficulties"; furthermore, "*Love on the Dole* makes no attempt to suggest that the middle class were responsible for unemployment and that class conflict was an inevitable or necessary consequence."<sup>129</sup> That Greenwood directly and successfully targeted a middle-class audience clearly alters, as Constantine shows, the subject matter, plot, and polemic of *Love on the Dole*. However, Constantine overlooks the

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<sup>128</sup> See, for example, Roger Webster, "Love on the Dole and the Aesthetic of Contradiction" in *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), 49-61, for a discussion of the many contradictions, especially literary and political, in the novel; Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel 1890-1945* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1994), for a discussion of the presentation of sexuality in the novel; and Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting* (Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers, 1997), 49-57, for a more general overview of the novel's themes.

<sup>129</sup> Constantine, "Love on the Dole and Its Reception," 235 and 236.

fact that this is complicated by the different layers of presentation that Greenwood offers, for he is not only presenting a working-class community to a middle-class readership but also a northern community to a southern audience and a local and regional culture to a national readership.

These different layers of presentation are complicated further by the central position of unemployment not just in *Love on the Dole* but generally in 1930s working-class fiction. As Andy Croft has demonstrated, unemployment actually gave working-class writers *time* to write. Paradoxically, then, unemployment is not simply a negative force and source for polemic; unemployment both directs the content of, and enables the writers' entry into, political fiction: "When novels finally did begin to appear in print in the late 1920s and early 1930s by working-class writers, they were almost all by and about unemployed men. This in turn played a major part in the politicisation of the British novel in these years and determined the way in which this politicisation took place."<sup>130</sup> Unemployment, central to *Love on the Dole* because of circumstance and politics, also adds to the local/national dimension which complicates Constantine's split between working-class subject matter and middle-class readership. One result of the popular perception of unemployment as delivered in *Love on the Dole* and other 1930s novels was to make unemployment an issue of national concern; as Croft writes, "Above all, it helped articulate a feeling for the *national* character of the problem"; the novels made it clear "that unemployment was a national catastrophe and a national shame."<sup>131</sup> *Love on the Dole*, as not only one of the first novels, but also as the most successful novel, to be written about the conditions of the working class by a working-class writer, is integral to both 1930s fiction and politics, for it helped make unemployment a national issue and

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<sup>130</sup> Croft, *Red Letter Days*, 97.

<sup>131</sup> Croft, *Red Letter Days*, 102 and 103.

“establish[ed] a moral vocabulary for social protest.”<sup>132</sup> Thus, *Love on the Dole* is characteristic of subsequent 1930s working-class fiction.

Altering the terms of Constantine’s argument by focusing on how unemployment is portrayed in *Love on the Dole*, and the reasons for that portrayal, draws attention to how the novel’s use of socialist polemic and of local geography and culture makes *Love on the Dole*, as Roger Webster has described it, so “contradictory.” Asking if the novel is “blind to its ideology, or whether it highlights its own inconsistencies,” Webster highlights the different layers of deliberate and accidental contradictions within *Love on the Dole*.<sup>133</sup> The novel attempts to present *and* represent Hanky Park’s – and by extension northern working-class England’s – poverty, culture, and politics to an audience unfamiliar with those qualities, leading the novel into a series of contradictions: between a positive representation of the author’s community and a damning of its political indifference; between an authentic account “faithful” to the life of his community and an account which will appear both authentic and appealing to a middle-class and southern readership; and between a novel which is a socialist polemic and a novel which describes, and becomes part of, its community’s conservatism.

That the presentation of the novel is as much from the local and regional to the national, or from the north to the south, as it is from the working class to the middle class can be seen in the outraged response of one local middle-class lady, Mrs Frankenburg, who was involved in charity work amongst the Salford poor. She wrote to the *Daily Dispatch* of her disapproval of what she perceived as the inaccurate account of working-class Salford life presented in *Love on the Dole*: “Factories in Salford rarely, if ever, begin work at 6 a.m. ... Schoolchildren are forbidden by law to work at such trades as clerking in a pawnshop for hours before and hours after school ... An uncertificated midwife openly practising like Mrs. Bull is quite impossible nowadays as her trade is

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<sup>132</sup> Croft, *Red Letter Days*, 110.

<sup>133</sup> Webster, “The Aesthetic of Contradiction,” in Hawthorn, *The British Working-Class Novel*, 54.

illegal.” Greenwood replied that, “I do not expect one near the top of the social scale to be informed as to what life means to those at the bottom” (*Daily Dispatch*, 26 September, 1933). Greenwood’s putdown once again demonstrates one of the contradictions of the novel: that it is intended to be an authentic account of working-class life, but that it is aimed at an audience who cannot be expected “to be informed” about that life. Mrs Frankenburg’s response reveals that not all middle-class reaction was positive, and that, despite the newspaper reviews, neither was all local reaction. In the late 1930s, Ewan MacColl wrote an unpublished novel, *The Damnable Town*, partly as a critical response to *Love on the Dole*.<sup>134</sup> Another local and Marxist reaction has been to compare Greenwood to another famous Salford artist, L. S. Lowry, criticizing the approach of both: “Their [Greenwood’s and Lowry’s] mission was to remain on the fringes observing without becoming involved. ... They never grasped the truth that it is not enough to interpret the world, the point, however, is to change it.”<sup>135</sup> Local historian Tony Flynn has furthermore recorded local reaction to the novel: “hardly any of them [people from Hanky Park] has a good word to say about Walter Greenwood. Most say that he blackened Salford’s name; as one lady said, ‘The mud from that book would have stuck on any area he cared to name, and it has passed on to generation after generation’.”<sup>136</sup> Negative local response emphasizes how integral a metropolitan reaction was to the novel’s success in changing attitudes to working-class poverty. Greenwood had to convince a metropolitan readership of the authenticity of the working-class community

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<sup>134</sup> Now held in the MacColl/Seeger Archive in Ruskin College, Oxford. See Ben Harker, *Class Act: The Cultural and Political Life of Ewan MacColl* (London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2007), 52-53, for a brief discussion of the unfinished novel. See also 26-28 for a description of MacColl’s involvement in, and reaction to, the march on Bexley Square.

<sup>135</sup> Working Class Movement Library, “Walter Greenwood and ‘Love on the Dole,’” Bulletin #4, <http://www.wcml.org.uk/greenwood.htm>, accessed 10 December, 2007. The criticism of course paraphrases Marx’s 11<sup>th</sup> Thesis on Feuerbach: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.” Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach” (written 1845, first published 1886), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>, accessed 1 February, 2008.

<sup>136</sup> Tony Flynn, *Hanky Park* (Manchester: Neil Radcliffe, 1990), 39.

he was describing. To do so, he had to conform to metropolitan expectations, rather than local attitudes.

The foremost contradiction in *Love on the Dole* is that of authenticity. Vincent Sherry's definition of authenticity, which describes the relationship between the authentic and the contemporary (see pp.7-8), points to the power of *Love on the Dole*, for it is a novel focused on the contemporary; it is also a novel that passed the test of the "reliable witnesses" that the London media and politicians felt themselves to be. It is this which gives *Love on the Dole* so much power and is the foundation for its wide success – particularly and most importantly by journalists and politicians – yet, as I argue, the novel deliberately alters, adapts, and shapes its authenticity. Furthermore, Benedict Anderson's definition of imagined communities also helps us understand the question of authenticity in *Love on the Dole*, for, in essence, there are three imagined communities present in the novel, all vying for authenticity: Greenwood's own rendering of Hanky Park; the historical Hanky Park; and the middle-class, southern perceptions of a northern working-class community. *Love on the Dole* attempts to appeal both to a socialist audience through its angry denouncement of the lives the working class are forced to lead and to a middle-class audience through its exposure of degrading poverty. Greenwood emphasizes the authenticity of his account through giving voice to a community that has been excluded from national identity and through portraying a community broken by poverty and violence. By emphasizing these issues, he makes his account appear more authentic to an outside readership, which conversely makes the account appear one-dimensional to those already inside the community. The novel therefore exposes, consciously or not, the complex and contradictory layers of authenticity.

Over the course of ten years, through various media, *Love on the Dole* reached a wide-ranging audience, all of whom responded to the degrading squalor it was describing and wishing to change. In this chapter, I examine the manner in which Greenwood, as a

member of the Labour Party writing at a time of local, national, and international industrial crisis, portrayed his community in *Love on the Dole* and altered aspects of it to achieve commercial and political success. Greenwood wrote in the *Manchester Evening News* that, “I have tried to show what life means to a young man living under the shadow of the dole, the tragedy of a lost generation who are denied consummation, in decency, of the natural hopes and desires of youth.” He does not describe it as propaganda, but a realist presentation of the suffering of working-class youth, with Dickensian touches: “I have given some relief to the grim realism by introducing the characteristic humour of the older inhabitants of ‘Hanky Park’” (date unknown). *Love on the Dole* is a novel describing a community in which the author had lived all his life, portraying a poverty that all of industrial England and Britain were suffering in reality. Its power, both fictional and political, lies in this apparent authenticity. Some of its characters are based on actual people and the climactic march on the town hall in Bexley Square in which socialist Larry Meath dies is based on an actual demonstration. Greenwood uses this authenticity to appeal to readers’ consciences, to affect political and social change. But it is a forged authenticity that necessarily adapts the reality for fictional and political purposes. Greenwood’s socialism clashes with his community’s conservatism through his desire to represent working-class life authentically. The political motivation behind that representation both underscores and yet undermines its authenticity.

## 2. Contemporaries & Predecessors

Walter Greenwood wrote *Love on the Dole* following a hundred years of local and national cultural and literary development. Drawing on prolonged intellectual interest in working-class life enabled Greenwood to write *Love on the Dole* with a literary confidence that previous working-class writers had not had. Moreover, Greenwood lived next to



Manchester, a city much described and investigated in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and sociology, and a city with an independent cultural scene. Greenwood is able to use this historical and cultural backdrop to place *Love on the Dole* as part of a shared national identity that gives the novel much of its power.

Around the turn of the century, “Manchester had the best newspaper and the best orchestra in the country ... [and] the best repertory theatre in the kingdom” (*EJ*, 252). The *Manchester Guardian* had been established in 1821 with the “intention [of] the promotion of the liberal interest in the aftermath of the Peterloo massacre.”<sup>137</sup> Under the editorship of C. P. Scott from 1872 to 1929, “a provincial paper was transformed into a national institution” and C. P. Scott himself was “the most important Liberal outside Parliament.”<sup>138</sup> Other than the *Manchester Guardian*, there were two evening papers, the *Manchester Evening Chronicle* and the *Guardian’s* sister paper the *Manchester Evening News*. The latter had a circulation of 152,000 in 1891 and, like the *Guardian*, was “broadly Liberal in its politics” (*M*, 136). To confirm the left-leaning nature of Manchester’s politics, its two Tory papers folded in 1902 (*Manchester Evening Mail*) and 1916 (*Manchester Courier*). Each of Manchester’s surrounding towns also had their local evening papers, such as the *Salford City Reporter*. In Manchester and its surrounding districts there was a choice of many daily and evening papers which were widely read, educating as well as directing the political knowledge of its citizens.

Greenwood makes clear the cultural advantages of living so close to Manchester, even for a young boy growing up in a Salford slum. In his autobiography, he remembers being taken by his mother to see *Faust*, and states that “there was not an opera, Russian, German, French or Italian, we had not heard.”<sup>139</sup> His mother was a keen opera-lover,

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<sup>137</sup> “History of the Guardian,” <http://www.guardian.co.uk/newsroom/story/0,728443,00.html>, 15 May 2007.

<sup>138</sup> Alan Kidd, *Manchester* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 160-61. Henceforth abbreviated *M*.

<sup>139</sup> Walter Greenwood, *There Was A Time* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), 59 and 124.

able to attend comparatively regularly due to complimentary tickets received in connection with her job. Greenwood also recalls attending a concert of German composers at the Hallé orchestra.

Greenwood mentions “eight theatres in three streets” around the Free Trade Hall.<sup>140</sup> Priestley refers more specifically to Manchester’s repertory theatre, the Gaiety, established by Annie Horniman in 1908. Its aim was to allow local dramatists the opportunity to have their plays performed and Manchester’s was the most successful of the many regional theatres that arose around the country at the time. In particular, the Gaiety performed the plays of Harold Brighouse, Stanley Houghton, and Allan Monkhouse. Brighouse, also born in Salford, is the most famous of these three playwrights. *Hobson’s Choice* (1916), the story of a comically but self-destructively stubborn Salford shoemaker, was first performed in Manchester, going on to both New York and London (made into a film by David Lean in the 1950s starring Charles Laughton and John Mills). Greenwood was not the first writer to portray Salford with commercial success and the popularity of a play such as *Hobson’s Choice* helped pave the way for the success of *Love on the Dole* (both as a novel and as a play), just as the very presence of a notable repertory theatre brightened the prospects of an aspiring writer, as Greenwood describes in his 1936 novel, *Standing Room Only*.

The reading Greenwood recalls in his autobiography is not described in great detail, but the cultural influence of his mother was clearly strong. As well as taking him to the opera and the Hallé, she also directed and corrected his reading. He remembers misquoting Wordsworth, to be reproved by his mother: “You’ll read it and if you cannot recite it to me *without a mistake* by Saturday night ... .” One of his mother’s friends also

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<sup>140</sup> Greenwood, *There Was A Time*, 125.

gave him as a Christmas present copies of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*, telling him to “get those in your noddle.”<sup>141</sup>

Apart from this strong cultural and artistic presence in Manchester, Greenwood also had the writings of Elizabeth Gaskell to draw upon. Gaskell portrayed the new industrial working class of the mid-nineteenth century for the first time and was also the first major writer to use urban, rather than rural, dialect. Her novels, in particular *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855), are set in the industrial districts of Manchester. Unlike Greenwood, Gaskell was concerned with the relationship between the different classes, especially between the workers and their employers, the latter conspicuously absent from *Love on the Dole*. The favourable presence of the employers is no doubt due to Gaskell’s social position. Gaskell, however, was scrupulously fair in her portrayal of both workers and employers, attempting to show both sides of the industrial story. In doing so, she drew attention to the hard-working decency of the workers. However, she made the subject of industrial relations politically neutral and therefore more palatable to the sensibilities of the middle and ruling classes in the south.

This moral propaganda differs from the political propaganda of Friedrich Engels’s *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844). His close friendship with Karl Marx and co-authorship of *The Communist Manifesto* make Engels one of the key figures in the development of international socialism and Manchester one of its key centres. Living in Manchester and working at his father’s factory in Salford, *The Condition of the Working Class* is an angry polemic on the squalid poverty in which the industrial, urban classes were forced to live. Written when just twenty-four, the importance of this work in Engels’s political education is clear. The work was written in German and its aim was “to tell the German bourgeoisie that it was ‘just as bad as the English’ ... [and] to speed the

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<sup>141</sup> Greenwood, *There Was A Time*, 81 and 201.

conversion of younger, educated Germans to socialism.”<sup>142</sup> However, it was not translated into English until 1886 and not published in England until 1892. When it was written, it was not designed to be instrumental in inciting the English working class to revolution. Once it had finally been translated and published in England, the work’s influence rose, especially on Manchester socialists such as Ewan MacColl: “Engels’ book became our Baedeker to the city. ... we felt a strong kinship with Friedrich.”<sup>143</sup>

Another famous author to address the condition of the northern industrial classes was Charles Dickens. Dickens’s early novels thrived on their characters’ poverty, but it was not until *Hard Times* (1854), set in the fictional industrial northern town of Coketown, that he dealt specifically with the poverty caused by industrial capitalism. Previously, his characters had successfully relied on kindly capitalist benefactors, but in *Hard Times* he focuses on the consequences to both the factory owners and the workers of industrial capitalism. The interaction between the masters and the workers demonstrates Dickens’s concern with the plight of the individual, regardless of their social background, rather than an involvement in a mass movement.

Dickens, Gaskell, and Engels all saw Manchester and its surrounding Lancashire towns as the centre of nineteenth-century industrialism and its social consequences. Their differing political viewpoints shape their writings, but their focus remains the same. All wrote of working-class communities from the outside; Greenwood had these various accounts of working-class life on which to draw, but few accounts written from working-class observers.

The only major socialist novel before *Love on the Dole* was *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (first published 1914). *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* is one of the most important and influential working-class novels, as it introduced the concept of socialism

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<sup>142</sup> Victor Kiernan in Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London: Penguin, 1987 [1845]), 11-12.

<sup>143</sup> Ewan MacColl, *Journeyman: An Autobiography* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1990), 183.

to a wide audience. The novel is both a socialist polemic and a rounded portrait of a working-class community. This portrait attempts to correct the stereotype of drinking, uneducated workers established in the nineteenth century and, in particular, to reclaim it for socialism. As in *Love on the Dole*, the main socialist figure, Frank Owen, is a morally upright, abstemious character. In its portrayal of a morally sound socialist and a downtrodden working-class community being kept in political ignorance by the national newspapers, its influence on Walter Greenwood is clear. Greenwood also followed Tressell's practice of giving his characters comically suggestive names, for example Ned Narkey or Mrs Dorbell. In a review of F. C. Ball's biography of Tressell, Greenwood wrote:

Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* was the first of its kind to reveal the conditions inflicted on working men by rapacious employers. Its readers saw themselves on the printed page and it was passed from hand to hand through workshop, building sites and factory. Its title among us of the north became "The Ragged Arsed Philanthropists." We, in our late teens, sold it by the hundred at public meetings and from door to door. (*The Sunday Times*, February 3, 1974)<sup>144</sup>

The first edition of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, published after Tressell's death, was heavily edited and abridged. Instead of the actual ending (not published until 1965), it finishes on the pessimistic note of Owen contemplating suicide (and killing his family with him), an episode which actually occurs around halfway through the novel. Grant Richards, who published the novel after Tressell's death, sought to appease its potential readership with such a bleak ending, yet this did not dilute its influence.<sup>145</sup> This is similar to the dilemma Greenwood faced: how not to alienate a middle-class readership whilst retaining a polemical edge.

Writing at a similar time to Tressell was D. H. Lawrence. Unlike Gaskell, Lawrence combined the urban and rural working-class experience in both *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*. Being the first working-class writer to achieve some literary and commercial

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<sup>144</sup> Walter Greenwood Collection. Newspaper Cuttings. WGP3/27. University of Salford Library.

<sup>145</sup> See F. C. Ball, *One of the Damned: The Life and Times of Robert Tressell* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 209-12, for a discussion of the changes made to the first edition of the novel.

success led many subsequent writers to follow suit, although with less success. Andy Croft outlines the many novelists who directly followed in Lawrence's footsteps towards the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s. Fred Boden, Harry Carlisle, Harry Heslop, Walter Brierley, Lewis Jones, all from mining districts, drew on Lawrence's fiction to describe their own working-class experiences.<sup>146</sup> Most of these novelists were rejected by reviewers for their naïve, old-fashioned literature, as well as for being too indebted to Lawrence. As outlined in Jonathan Rose's account of the intellectual working classes, many working-class writers and readers were quite conservative in their literary outlook.<sup>147</sup> Greenwood was not a literary revolutionary either, yet *Love on the Dole* was reviewed far more favourably, perhaps because, unlike some of his contemporaries, Greenwood does not preach or "hit you hard in the face" as the *Sunday Times* described J. C. Grant's *The Back-to-Backs*.<sup>148</sup>

Lawrence moved away from England and his working-class background, as reflected in his fiction, but he was still the only major working-class writer other would-be writers could look towards. Lawrence is quoted at the beginning of *Love on the Dole*, from a letter of his in which he wrote, "Oh, it's time the whole thing was changed, absolutely. And the men will have to do it ... I get more revolutionary every minute."<sup>149</sup> After the success of *Love on the Dole* as a novel and play, Greenwood was asked to revise a play of Lawrence's, *The Daughter-in-Law*, which was staged in 1936 as *My Son's My Son*. Although its performance was promoted as "an unrevised play by D. H. Lawrence completed by Walter Greenwood," it seems that "Greenwood did surprisingly little with Lawrence's

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<sup>146</sup> Croft, *Red Letter Days*, 59-92.

<sup>147</sup> Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 116-45.

<sup>148</sup> Croft, *Red Letter Days*, 77.

<sup>149</sup> Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole* (London: Vintage, 1993 [1933]), 7. Henceforth abbreviated *LD*. Lawrence wrote the letter, which also contained poems of a revolutionary nature, on 28 December 1928 to Charles Wilson. See *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence: Volume 7*, eds. Keith Sagar and James T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 98-99, for the letter in full.

text.”<sup>150</sup> The performance of the play in London and Manchester was not a success.

However, Greenwood’s involvement shows how he had taken over Lawrence’s mantle of England’s foremost working-class novelist.

### 3. 1930s Writing

*Love on the Dole* was written at a time when interest in working-class culture and writing was high, particularly amongst intellectual socialists, with an emphasis on both representing the poor and helping the poor represent themselves. In 1927, Manchester-born Ellen Wilkinson, Labour MP and novelist, wrote that, “There has been, as yet, no great interpretative novel in English of working-class life,” indicating the direction of 1930s literature.<sup>151</sup> Samuel Hynes has written that although little of literary worth was produced by the working class in the 1930s, the condition and life of the working class became of greater concern: “as political and social awareness grew among educated, middle-class young people, their sense of the need to speak to and for the poor and the workers grew too.”<sup>152</sup> Andy Croft and Valentine Cunningham are much more sympathetic to the working-class literature of the period, but also note the interest taken in the development of working-class writing by Cecil Day-Lewis, Stephen Spender, and others.<sup>153</sup> The nature of this interest and of their concerns is summarised by Cunningham: “first, how a mass audience could be claimed for an undebased and undebasing art; second, how the masses, particularly the industrialized working class, should best become the subject of art; third, whether new, ‘proletarian’ forms might be discovered to unseat

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<sup>150</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *The Plays*, eds. Hans-Wilhelm Schwarze and John Worthen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xciii and xciv.

<sup>151</sup> Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2004 [1929]), xv.

<sup>152</sup> Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: Pimlico, 1992 [1976]), 11.

<sup>153</sup> Croft, *Red Letter Days*, 99-101, and Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 296ff.

the hegemony of the old bourgeois ones.”<sup>154</sup> There were also increased opportunities for working-class writers to be published, which allowed for the great amount of working-class literature, albeit of uneven quality, published in the 1930s.<sup>155</sup>

As the *New York Times* reviewer noted, *Love on the Dole* was published at around the same time as J. B. Priestley’s *English Journey*, in which Priestley recorded his observations on the state of England in 1933. Priestley’s passionate conclusion not only records his anger at the state of industrial England but hints at the divide between north and south that is an undercurrent in *Love on the Dole*: “We ought to be ashamed of ourselves. Anybody who imagines that this is a time for self-congratulation has never poked his nose outside Westminster, the City and Fleet Street” (*EJ*, 412). Published the year after *Love on the Dole* (1934), J. B. Priestley’s *English Journey* is another example of a middle-class observer investigating the lives of the English. *English Journey* has often been overlooked in favour of Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier*, which it predates by three years, but Priestley avoids the political and personal confusion which permeates Orwell’s work. It is also not as metropolitan in its outlook as *The Road to Wigan Pier*, though it is still conscious of the divide between metropolitan and regional life and culture; one purpose of *English Journey* is to explain the latter to the former. But Priestley, who stood as independent candidate for parliament in 1945, is not swayed by socialist polemic or idealism. Instead, he is a self-conscious outsider observing, investigating, and reporting on the condition of England in order to effect social change.

Commissioned by his editor, for *English Journey* Priestley went travelling around England, before arriving back in London to draw his pointed, angry conclusions on the poverty at the heart of an industrial England which “makes up the larger part of the

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<sup>154</sup> Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, 296.

<sup>155</sup> See Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, 296-322, Croft, *Red Letter Days*, esp. 59-95, and Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents: The Democratization of Writing in Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 98-129, for detailed accounts of working-class writing in the 1930s.



Midlands and the north of England and exists everywhere” (*EJ*, 412). Priestley is self-conscious enough to be able to identify himself with the well-off, comfortable middle class; the guilt and anger are directed at himself as well as the metropolitan reader. Priestley is also too self-aware to mistake himself for the poor ordinary worker, which leaves him unable simply to shrug off the disgust and anger he feels. *English Journey* has never been seized on like *The Road to Wigan Pier* and no study has been made to discover what, if any, effect the work had on political and popular thought. *English Journey* is far more powerfully written, with none of Orwell’s confusion (and shuffling of facts) and is indicative of the concern that those with leanings to the left felt for the plight of the unemployed in the 1930s.

This growing interest in working-class life and its place in British identity led, for example, to the formation of Mass-Observation in 1937, the same year as the publication of George Orwell’s famous account, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, the decade’s most famous example of political investigation, which demonstrates the nature of the aims outlined by Cunningham. It is written by an upper-middle-class author, observing and investigating an industrial community from an educated vantage point. It strains for authenticity to make its political point more potent. Having already lived down and out with the poor in London and Paris, Orwell travelled to the north of England to document the time he spent living with miners in Wigan and other northern towns. However this authenticity is necessarily false, because of Orwell’s superior social position, a position he reveals in the wonderment with which he records the miners’ lives. Orwell also secretly fictionalizes his documentary text to centre it on Wigan. It is an unsatisfactory polemical work, managing neither to capture the ordinary everyday lives of miners nor to outline Orwell’s own political philosophy. Despite its failings, *The Road to Wigan Pier* is characteristic of the frequent attempts by middle- and upper-class writers to document the lives of the working class, works often filled with guilt, polemicism, and confusion. It demonstrates a

metropolitan interest in regional culture, socialist confusion over how best to represent and improve working-class life, and a shift towards creating a shared national identity.

Unlike *Love on the Dole* or *English Journey*, *The Road to Wigan Pier* was written when the fascist threat was not limited to Italy, but had extended to the Nazi threat from Germany and from within Britain, through the British Union of Fascists. The need to examine, report, and influence British working-class life thus took on a greater urgency, which was seen also in the Mass-Observation project. Although not specifically socialist, Mass-Observation was antifascist, a populist project which “continued to relate its social importance to the special nature of the period.”<sup>156</sup> It was an anthropological investigation of British working-class life, determined “to document British life ... but also to educate the British.”<sup>157</sup> Set up by Charles Madge and Tom Harrison in 1937, the purpose of Mass-Observation was to record in minute detail the everyday lives of ordinary Englishmen through the observations of “untrained common people.”<sup>158</sup> This offers a fascinating and overwhelming document of 1930s England, but fails in its aim to provide a portrait of ordinary people by ordinary people. This is due to the project’s many contradictions, as outlined by Samuel Hynes: Mass-Observation “was at once literary and scientific, realist and surrealist, political and psychological, Marxist and Freudian, objective and salvationist. In its confusions of methods and goals it is a complex example of the confusions of young intellectuals of the time.”<sup>159</sup> It is this last point which points to one of the main contradictions of Mass-Observation: that instead of conscripting a large army of ordinary untrained observers, it instead led to the involvement of trained middle-class observers.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 280.

<sup>157</sup> Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, 333.

<sup>158</sup> Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, 279.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> See Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, 338, for a list of M-O contributors and their backgrounds.

The 1930s saw many attempts from within and without the working class to interpret working-class life through other media such as documentary, theatre, film, and journalism. Much of this was politically motivated or influenced, for example the cultural activities of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). Although Greenwood was not a communist, the party's emphasis on conversion through culture is similar to some of the propagandist polemic of *Love on the Dole*. The policies of the CPGB point to the reasons for the success of the novel. In *Love on the Dole*, Greenwood appeals to the middle class to help alleviate the situation, but in the late 1920s and early 1930s, communist policy and rhetoric was run along the lines of "class against class," a policy directive from Moscow which attempted to pit the working class against not only other classes, but also the Labour Party, who were termed "social fascists." Through these extreme alienating policies which took the actual interests and political views of the British working class into little account, the CPGB was politically ineffective and unsuccessful, but culturally it gained some success. In order "to forge a revolutionary class-consciousness Communist Party schools, theatre groups, sports clubs and film societies all appeared."<sup>161</sup> Communist schools attempted to educate the young into their way of thinking, teaching communist doctrine and philosophy. Alongside the schools existed the Young Comrades' League (YCL), which gave budding communists the opportunity to involve themselves in cultural and leisure activities.

Ewan MacColl, a member of the YCL and then the CPGB, was a close contemporary of Walter Greenwood, both of them politically and artistically active in Salford in the 1930s. MacColl was a founding member of the Salford section of the Workers' Theatre Movement (WTM), despite being only sixteen-years-old. The WTM was intended as a militant and radical form of theatre, but "remained within the traditional paradigm of

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<sup>161</sup> Matthew Worley, *Class Against Class: The Communist Party in Britain Between the Wars* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 194. Worley's book gives a detailed account of Communist Party policies of the period.

labour theatre ... reliant on a stage, rehearsals and the audience-performer divide.”<sup>162</sup>

Breaking free from these traditions, especially as most of the members had little theatrical experience, was not easy. MacColl’s revolutionary intentions were, however, clear from the outset: “Now I saw the theatre simply as a new and exciting form of propaganda ... the theatre should become a weapon, it should be something that spoke for all the people like me ... who wanted to tear it all down, and make something better.”<sup>163</sup>

MacColl’s experiences in the WTM reflect the local-national-international schisms that existed in 1930s politics, economics, and literature. The Salford WTM was heavily influenced by the German communist theatre movement. Inspired by the idea of Agit-Prop theatre, which fell in with MacColl’s natural inclinations, the WTM’s aim was to take theatre to the people. The WTM plays were written collectively and often directly about a local event. For example, “Towards the end of 1931 we set about writing plays dealing with the cotton industry where a situation of acute crisis was developing,” despite knowing little about the industry or the relevant trade unions.<sup>164</sup> MacColl and his comrades took their plays to the factories around Manchester and Lancashire, performing to groups of unemployed workers or to the workers as they left work for the day. On one occasion, they went to Burnley where the textile workers of Lancashire were uniting for a controversial demonstration. MacColl remembers that “it was a thrilling experience to stand on the top of that truck and sing and perform, for your own people ... it’s what theatre should be ... .”<sup>165</sup>

The WTM aimed to be a national movement. *The Red Megaphones*, as MacColl’s troupe were called, based their plays on local issues, appealing directly to local workers. The WTM preferred that they perform nationally-written scripts in order to give some

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<sup>162</sup> Worley, *Class Against Class*, 205.

<sup>163</sup> Ewan MacColl, “Theatre of Action, Narrative” in *Theatres of the Left, 1880-1935: Workers’ Theatre Movements in Britain and America*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 226.

<sup>164</sup> MacColl, “Theatre of Action,” in Samuel, *Theatres of the Left*, 233.

<sup>165</sup> MacColl, “Theatre of Action,” in Samuel, *Theatres of the Left*, 238.

standard consistency to the movement. MacColl “came to the conclusion that the WTM scripts we were getting weren’t as good as they should be. We had a strong feeling that we were being written down to. Furthermore, we felt that the London groups were a bit out of touch with the problems that confronted us in the industrial North.”<sup>166</sup> By the mid-1930s, a victim of its own success, the WTM collapsed, as “the party district committee began to question the wisdom of leaving an influential group in the hands of a couple of prima donnas.”<sup>167</sup> However, perhaps more than in any other communist organization, “the political and the cultural coalesced to produce a working class theatre that was rooted firmly in the class struggle.”<sup>168</sup>

The environment in which Greenwood was writing was far more politically involved than the previous decade. Writers aimed for a close involvement with the workers, rather than the distance which modernists had sought. Through the poetry of Auden, the documentary movement led by Grierson, the revolutionary theatre MacColl was involved in, the social journalism of Priestley and Orwell, the novels of Green, Grassic Gibbon, and Greenwood, this close involvement was attempted in various, and variously successful, ways. They emphasized the importance of recording and preserving regional identity at a time of national and international crisis in order to make both regional and national identity more solid constructs. This is not to say that these writers had a strong influence on working-class opinion; the collapse of parliamentary representation for the Left, for example, suggests otherwise. However, the efforts of these writers demonstrate the ongoing debates and arguments among the Left in the 1930s and the concern in involving the working class in these debates – and the difficulty in achieving this.

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<sup>166</sup> MacColl, “Theatre of Action,” in Samuel, *Theatres of the Left*, 231.

<sup>167</sup> MacColl, “Theatre of Action,” in Samuel, *Theatres of the Left*, 250.

<sup>168</sup> Worley, *Class Against Class*, 208.

#### 4. Manchester & Salford: A Brief Overview

Whilst visiting Manchester on his journey around England, Priestley quotes the adage: “what Manchester thinks today England will think tomorrow.” With horror and anger, he tells the reader that now, “we still see some of the results ... of what Manchester thought in what has been left us, to mourn over, by the vast, greedy, slovenly, dirty process of industrialization for quick profits – and damn the consequences” (*EJ*, 252). He is documenting the change from the nineteenth-century industrial powerhouse to a city, and surrounding region, blighted by unemployment and filled with squalid slums. He condemns the short-termism and lack of foresight of the Manchester industrialists, which led to the industrial ugliness of many northern towns and the eventual collapse of Lancashire’s traditional industries.

Salford in the 1930s was described by CPGB member Edmund Frow as “arguably the most grim place in the North of England.”<sup>169</sup> In the 1840s, Friedrich Engels had little better to say for it: “[I]t is an old and therefore very unwholesome, dirty, and ruinous locality ... . The average construction of Salford is ... much worse than that of Manchester, and so, too, in respect to cleanliness.”<sup>170</sup> There were various poor quarters of Manchester also, but Salford was permanently a centre for the poor, casual worker.

In quoting the Manchester adage, Priestley is pointing to the importance of Manchester not just to Lancashire’s economy, but to England’s and the Victorian Empire’s. The success of Manchester was a result of the variety of its industries. Manchester’s (and Lancashire’s) economy centred on cotton, but textiles, cloth, and waterproofs were also manufactured in great quantity. From its rise around the turn of the nineteenth century, Manchester became a centre for banking, commerce, and retail

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<sup>169</sup> Edmund and Ruth Frow, *The Battle of Bexley Square: Salford Unemployed Workers’ Demonstration – 1<sup>st</sup> October 1931* (Manchester: Working-Class Movement Library, 1984), 5.

<sup>170</sup> Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 99.

(especially department stores and chains, such as the Co-op, established in Rochdale in 1851). The centre of the railway network, Manchester was an industrial, economic, and transport centre, “the spider of Lancashire’s web” as described by Leon Faucher (*M*, 11).

In the nineteenth century, Manchester was the industrial centre of the country, helping forge a new kind of Britain, economic leader of the world. Much of Manchester’s economic strength and reputation was built on its unfussy, imaginative ambition. For example, when its economy was suffering from tariffs imposed by Liverpool on imported goods at the end of the nineteenth century, Manchester built its own canal, making the inland city the fourth biggest port in the country, establishing the canal’s docks in Salford and providing much of the casual labour for Salford’s workers. At the same time, Trafford Park Industrial Estate, near to the docks, was built. The first and largest of its kind, it was built in order to “attract a cross section of firms in textiles, engineering, food production and brewing,” although “engineering, the oil industry and chemicals preponderated” (*M*, 115-16). It is to Trafford Park that Harry Hardcastle in *Love on the Dole* desperately goes in vain search of a job.

Labour organizations have always had strong representation in the two cities. The Social Democratic Federation (SDF), a forerunner to the CPGB, had around 200 members in Salford in 1897 and a total of 1,089 in Lancashire (*M*, 175).<sup>171</sup> Often, political activism by these groups focused on the unemployed. In 1905, for example, a demonstration of unemployed workers, organized by the SDF, marched on Manchester town hall, again in 1908. The early 1930s also saw communist action focus on the unemployed, through the National Unemployed Workers’ Movement (NUWM). However, these marches had little effect and, beyond Labour, socialist and communist organizations had little political success: “Political protest by the unemployed generally gave rise to public disturbance not political change” (*M*, 179).

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<sup>171</sup> See Worley, *Class Against Class*, 1-2, for an account of the complicated transition from the SDF to the CBGB.

Despite the strength of the labour movement in the city and its Liberal businessmen, Manchester was to a great extent a Conservative stronghold up until 1945. After the Reform Act of 1832, which partially extended the franchise to small businessmen, Manchester became a Liberal city. The Second Reform Act of 1867, which extended the franchise further, turned the city Tory, which it remained until 1906. The interwar period saw Labour's position strengthen. Nevertheless, in parliamentary elections between 1918 and 1937, Conservatives won 43 seats, Labour 24, and the Liberals 7 (M, 208). Salford too was not a Labour stronghold – all three seats went to the Conservatives in the 1931 election. Manchester's history is one of economic and industrial success and failure, of wealth and poverty, of innovation and reluctance to move with the times, of Conservative politics and labour activism. This conservatism is vital to an understanding of *Love on the Dole*. The novel's characters are apathetically conservative, unwilling to contemplate radical political change. As I shall argue, it is this conservatism which underscores the political and social authenticity of *Love on the Dole*, necessarily devaluing its socialist credentials.

*Love on the Dole* is set specifically in Hanky Park, a Salford slum demolished in the 1960s' slum clearances. Hanky Park was an archetypal industrial urban area, its houses two-up two-down terraces with communal toilets and little privacy. This meant squalid living conditions and high mortality rates: "half the children born in Salford died before their fifth birthday. The life expectancy for adults was estimated to be in the late forties or early fifties. Tuberculosis, the classic disease of poverty, and bronchitis...were the chief killers."<sup>172</sup>

Work was found locally. In *Love on the Dole*, all the characters work at Marlowe's engineering works. Although there were several factories and mills in Salford at the time, Greenwood sets the workers in one generic factory, not describing the work in any great

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<sup>172</sup> Flynn, *Hanky Park*, 12.



detail but making the point that work was always local – Trafford Park on the other side of the Docks is as far as Harry goes to seek work – and how consequently closed the community was. *Love on the Dole* is a novel which remains within its closed community, whilst addressing national and international issues. This reflects the strong theme of local, national, and international crises which runs through the novel.

There have been various portraits of Manchester and Salford, the most astute of which is Robert Roberts's *The Classic Slum* (1971). Roberts, born in 1905, two years after Greenwood, came from Hope Street, an area not far from Hanky Park. *The Classic Slum* takes the form of a memoir, recollecting his experiences in growing up in a corner shop in Salford in the first quarter of the century. Although full of personal reminiscences, it examines the period and the city in far greater detail than an ordinary memoir. In it, he details the morals, social order, habits, religion, and politics of the Salford working class, and provides invaluable insights into Salford life at that time. The period he is describing differs slightly from *Love on the Dole*, but nevertheless the two texts sit powerfully alongside each other.

## 5. The Political Context

*Love on the Dole* is a novel rooted in the economic, social, and political crises of the early 1930s. The crises existed on an international, national, and local level, all three of which hung uneasily together. Throughout the 1920s, unemployment was high in Britain, with much industrial unrest. In the aftermath of the First World War, industrial conflict was fierce and frequent, often involving the army. The industrial unrest culminated in the General Strike in 1926, the failure of which saw “the effective defeat of the Trade Union movement only marginally offset by the growing role of the Labour Party in Parliament,”

which formed its first, short-lived, minority government in 1924.<sup>173</sup> 1929, with unemployment already over a million, saw the formation of the second Labour Government; as the largest party, it was the closest they had ever come to forming a majority. However, just two years later, Prime Minister and party leader Ramsay MacDonald broke away from the Labour Party to form the National Government. The resulting election saw Labour's representation fall from 288 to just 46 seats (with an extra six Labour-affiliated independents), in the biggest landslide in modern parliamentary history.

At the centre of *Love on the Dole* is a sense of the helplessness of not being able to change one's circumstances. The local is reliant on the national; the national is dependent on the international; events at once far and remote, yet strangely immediate. The collapse of the Labour Government in 1931, Mussolini's Fascist government in Italy, along with the rise of Hitler, made many on the left afraid of the possible popularity of fascism in Britain. Oswald Mosley, formerly a leading thinker on the left, embodied fascism's appeal. His movement, the British Union of Fascists, was a failure, but even the National Government was seen as sympathetic, if not to fascism itself, then to European fascist governments. The 1930s were a decade of great political uncertainty, events in Europe indicating how precarious British political stability was.

The backdrop to the political instability was the worldwide depression, which had been triggered by the Wall Street Crash of 1929, which "meant that economic depression was no longer a peculiar British problem but part of a world problem."<sup>174</sup> Mass unemployment in particular affected the industrial towns and villages of Wales, Scotland, and the north of England, all three regions having unemployment levels between 23.5% and 29.3% in July 1929, whilst the south of England enjoyed relative prosperity.<sup>175</sup> In

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<sup>173</sup> David Ayers, *English Literature of the 1920s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004 [1999]), 100.

<sup>174</sup> Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990* (London: Penguin, 1996), 151.

<sup>175</sup> See Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 10-11.

December 1930, official unemployment levels rose to a record two and a half million. By July 1931, it had risen further still to 2.75 million.<sup>176</sup> Unofficially, the figure was even higher, at 3,400,000 at the end of 1932.<sup>177</sup> It was not until December 1935 that unemployment fell below two million, though unofficial figures had it at over two million until 1937.<sup>178</sup>

Due in part to the huge unemployment levels, but also the split in the party which had led to the National Government and a united Labour opposition and a perception of not being fit to govern, Labour did disastrously at the October 1931 general election. The unemployment crisis, which made “a bad situation suddenly, dramatically worse,” was largely out of the British Government’s control.<sup>179</sup> The National Government, which looked to many “like a put-up job by the old men” could not really affect what was an international crisis.<sup>180</sup> This did not stop it bringing in harsh measures to deal with the situation, in part because it was scared by the controversial May Committee’s exaggerated warning that high unemployment and the subsequent costs would cause “a prospective budget deficit of no less than £120 million.”<sup>181</sup>

At the heart of *Love on the Dole* is the increased suffering and humiliation caused by the introduction of the household means test, which was brought in by the National Government towards the end of 1931 to reduce the levels of unemployment benefit. Mass demonstrations and hunger marches, both local and national, were organized by the communist-led NUWM. As in *Love on the Dole*, these marches were met with violent police opposition. A key incident in *Love on the Dole*, which highlights how Greenwood has to translate authenticity for his own purposes, is the march on Salford Town Hall in

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<sup>176</sup> Pimlott, *Labour and the Left*, 10 and 12.

<sup>177</sup> Bernard Harris, “Unemployment and the Dole in Interwar Britain,” in *Twentieth-Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change*, ed. Paul Johnson (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 1994), 205.

<sup>178</sup> Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 341 and Harris, “Unemployment and the Dole,” in Johnson, *Twentieth-Century Britain*, 205.

<sup>179</sup> Pimlott, *Labour and the Left*, 10.

<sup>180</sup> Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, 171.

<sup>181</sup> Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, 157.

Bexley Square. In the novel, the march is made up of a mixture of political activists (both local and national) and listless unemployed workers. This seems an accurate reflection.

Branson and Heinemann write that, “The NUWM attracted those who wanted to get something done ... with a definite conviction ... . Others were simply glad of a chance to be involved in activities which broke the deadly monotony of life on the dole.”<sup>182</sup> It is this confused mixture of activism and apathy, involvement and ignorance, which characterizes left-wing politics and the unemployment movement in the 1930s.

Throughout 1931, marches took place around the country. The *Daily Worker*, perhaps with some exaggeration, reported that 150,000 marched in Glasgow, 80,000 in Manchester, and 100,000 in London in October. A much smaller march took place in Salford on 1 October, 1931, as recorded and fictionalized in *Love on the Dole*. The purpose of the march was “to protest to the special City Council meeting” and “to put the demands of the unemployed” to the meeting which was discussing Salford Finance Committee’s economy proposals at Salford Town Hall in Bexley Square.<sup>183</sup> However, the police prevented the marchers from reaching the town hall, leading to violent clashes.

The *Daily Worker* reported on the events the following day:

20,000 ON STREETS IN SALFORD: Police Meet With Stern Resistance

Salford, Thursday. – A huge demonstration of 20,000 Salford unemployed came into conflict with the police to-day. The demonstration assembled in Liverpool Street and marched towards Albion Street Labour Exchange.

Here the police launched their attack. The workless fought back, using sticks and banner poles as weapons.

So vigorously did the workers defend themselves that they drove off the police attack and reformed their ranks.

They started off to the Town Hall to protest against the police action. At Bexley Square, where the Town Hall is situated, the police attacked again. Once more the workless fought back. Women demonstrators were prominent in the resistance to the police.

A number of workers were injured in the fighting, as were some of the police. Dozens of arrests were made. Some of those arrested were never got to the police station, being rescued by their fellows en route.

After this the demonstrators once more reformed their ranks and went to the Park, where a protest meeting was held. (2 October, 1931)<sup>184</sup>

<sup>182</sup> Branson and Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties*, 26.

<sup>183</sup> Frow, *The Battle of Bexley Square*, 11.

<sup>184</sup> Original copies of the *Daily Worker* viewed at the Working Class Movement Library, Salford.

The *Daily Worker's* language is dramatic, violent, and propagandist. Edmund and Ruth Frow, the former involved in the demonstration, making a brief appearance in *Love on the Dole* as “a finely featured young man with long hair” (LD, 199), describe the police’s first “attack” as “a brush with the police” and state that there “must have been nearer ten thousand.”<sup>185</sup> However, the violence of the main clash with the police in Bexley Square is not overstated. MacColl recalled that “dozens of mounted police suddenly appeared followed by foot police brandishing their clubs. They charged and the first engagement was fierce. But when the police tasted blood, they started lashing out at anyone in their path.”<sup>186</sup> Various arrests were made and the judge “sentenced [Edmund Frow] to five months, George Watson to three months and Albert Lister to two months hard labour.”<sup>187</sup> The march and the reaction of the police were characteristic of the marches around the country, showing how polarized the country was. It was not until late 1934, when mainstream political opinion finally turned against the means test (it was dropped completely in 1941), that the marches were treated favourably.

In the *Daily Worker's* contemporary, slanted account and Edmund Frow’s historical, but also personal, account, we see two attempts to translate a political event into an historical authenticity. Greenwood’s version of the march is more overtly fictionalized. He uses authenticity to appeal to a non-working-class readership rather than for propaganda. The aims of the *Daily Worker* and *Love on the Dole* are the same: both forge the authentic into their own authenticized accounts in order to change the status quo. But rather than representing it as an incitement to communist-inspired rebellion, Greenwood presents the march as the last resort of the politically illiterate and the economically desperate in order to gain more sympathy amongst an influential readership.

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<sup>185</sup> Frow, *Battle of Bexley Square*, 13.

<sup>186</sup> Frow, *Battle of Bexley Square*, 16.

<sup>187</sup> Frow, *Battle of Bexley Square*, 21.

Greenwood's description of the demonstration on Bexley Square presents the march as a confused mixture of activism and apathy, involvement and ignorance. Unlike the *Daily Worker*, which uses the rhetoric of "class against class" and worker against authority, Greenwood presents little sense of community or class rebellion, but describes the march as a coming together according to circumstance or "individual disposition" (LD, 196). Like many of the workers on the march, Harry Hardcastle feels a mixture of "bewilderment" and "resentment" (LD, 199), as well as excitement at for once being able to give expression to his frustration. Throughout the episode, however, Greenwood uses words such as "disarray," "excessive self-consciousness," "shamefaced," and "shamed" (LD, 200 and 201) to describe the protestors, and once the march has ended, Harry is conscious of "his guilt in having been one of the demonstrators" (LD, 206). He is an accidental participant, carried away by the moment, but unable to solidify his political confusion into a fixed ideology. Greenwood's account of the march is dramatic and tense and shows a community fired by resentment and genuine anger at the National Government's extension of the Means Test (which cuts Harry Hardcastle off the dole completely). But he does not show a politically organized community, rather a confused crowd of "shabby fellows" and "blowsy women" (LD, 197) unsure of their motives, led by demonstrators arguing amongst one another. This changes the focus of the scene from the *Daily Worker's* description. Greenwood fictionalizes the account further by ending the episode with Harry watching "a truncheon strike thrice, twice on Larry's back and once on his head" (LD, 205), which leads to Larry's eventual death. This indicates a dramatic antipathy to the police and authority on Greenwood's part and backs up his socialist credentials. However, such a dramatic climax, involving such brutal authenticity, can also be read as appealing to the values and consciences of a middle-class readership, inviting them to intervene to prevent further unnecessary death.

The NUWM was viewed with some suspicion by leaders of the CPGB, indicating how difficult it was to find a connection between the leaders of the labour movement and the workers. The debate in the 1930s on the Left, which claimed exclusively to represent the working class, concerned the best way for the labour movement to go forward. As in other European countries, the debate ranged from radical socialism and communism to the moderate centre. The economic collapse of the country suggested to the Left that capitalism had failed. In the rhetoric of the hour the final nails should be hammered into its coffin. More moderate politicians saw it necessary to collaborate with the capitalist parties, before being able, when eventually returned to government, to initiate a more socialist regime. In the short term, these debates were irrelevant; the National Government carried on regardless and did, eventually, succeed in improving the situation. The issue also splintered the labour movement into small, confused fragments all at odds with each other. However, in the long term these debates started the process of radicalization which led to the postwar Labour Government of 1945.

When the CPGB was forced to allow local activism, its influence was far greater. Its national newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, is an example. The debate amongst the Party's leaders was whether to make it an ideological, propagandist newspaper, or to make it a topical, lively paper; the result was somewhere in between. At the beginning of 1931, it focused on the strikes in south Wales and Burnley, which were seen as symbolic of the workers' wider struggle against their capitalist employers. Propagandist and rousing, the paper nevertheless largely ignored mass unemployment until the crisis was brought to a head by the formation of the National Government in August. Instead, it largely preferred to praise the Soviet Union, calling it "The Most Cheerful Country in the World" (13 February, 1931). The paper also had extensive sports coverage. Football reports, however, disappeared towards the end of the year. This mixture of propaganda, activism, and populism in the newspaper reflects in general the labour movement's

difficulty in appealing to the workers. Besides the *Daily Worker*, there were many local variants too, amateurishly but passionately put together. These dealt with more local issues, in order to appeal to local workers who would recognize the issues discussed in the paper. Ewan MacColl recalls:

In the factory papers there'd be a leading article written about, say, the state of the engineering industry, or some specific struggle that was going on inside the industry. And then the leader writer, if he was good, would relate this not only to the factory but to specific departments inside the factory. Some of this information he would arrive at intuitively or through his knowledge of the politics of the whole industry, some he would arrive at through consultation with whoever had been brought into the branch. Occasionally it would be someone from within the plant – that happened with the *Salford Docker*, where you got actual dockers writing the editorials. But at first it would be a party member who might be unemployed, who'd make it his business to find out as much as he could about that factory and to interpret it politically. Usually there was an attempt to write some kind of objective analysis of a specific situation. But there'd be all kinds of other pieces, of course, little satiric squibs, lampoons and verses and all the rest of it. These would deal with a little corner of the political picture.<sup>188</sup>

National wholesalers refused to distribute the *Daily Worker*, instead the paper was sent by train throughout the country to local activists. Thus, the paper was sold on the streets by local members to workers. This allowed for a rare contact between communists and non-communists. Ewan MacColl remembers selling the *Salford Docker* and “at least half a dozen different factory newspapers ... at the docks maybe twice a week at the early morning shift ... until they [the workers] went in.”<sup>189</sup>

In *Love on the Dole*, we see Larry Meath (a generic socialist rather than a communist) standing on street corners, advocating socialism and distributing literature. This is characteristic of local activists' work, enabling them to meet the non-converted. The CPGB seems to have had few formal organized initiatives to make this easier. Worley writes of the importance of individuals to the local cause: “Very often, it was the enthusiasm, fight and spirit of an individual communist activist that acted as a source of inspiration for young workers ‘looking for answers to the problems facing the ordinary

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<sup>188</sup> MacColl, “Theatre of Action,” in Samuel, *Theatres of the Left*, 220.

<sup>189</sup> MacColl, “Theatre of Action,” in Samuel, *Theatres of the Left*, 219 and 221.



people’.”<sup>190</sup> The CPGB’s antipathy to individual initiatives conflicts with the importance of individuals to the communist movement.<sup>191</sup>

Although “the Labour Party ... has been seen as a force for ‘nationalization’,” the national success of Labour was also “contingent on local circumstances ... coloured by a multiplicity of regional and subregional political cultures.”<sup>192</sup> Thus, the Labour Party was dependent on appealing to a wide variety of voters, each motivated by different circumstances and issues, while trying, like the CPGB, to create a sentiment of a national, affiliated working class. Given the electoral success of the Labour Party, it was clearly more successful in doing so than the CPGB, but its collapse in 1931 indicates how fragile that success was. The importance of local activism to socialist politics is demonstrated by a study of Yorkshire workers at the end of the First World War. In 1918, the Sheffield Peoples’ College carried out a survey designed to ascertain the level of intellectual interest amongst adult workers. What remains of the survey’s results are recorded by Jonathan Rose. Between 20 and 26% of those questioned were adjudged to be intellectually “well-equipped,” meaning having a knowledge of Dickens, Ruskin, and Shakespeare, the Bible, art and song, as well as some political, historical, and economic knowledge. Of those who had some political awareness, it was mainly local. The report listed the attributes of some of the intellectually well-equipped workers:

“Has almost never visited any other town, but knows Sheffield politics fairly well.” “Broad knowledge of local politics ... but knows little of other towns.” “Interested in local politics...”. “Thorough knowledge of local politics...”. “Knows history and local politics well...”.<sup>193</sup>

The major political events in *Love on the Dole* are those which occur locally and have a local effect – the means test and the disastrous march on Bexley Square. Its emphasis on

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<sup>190</sup> Worley, *Class Against Class*, 198.

<sup>191</sup> CPGB membership reached a peak of 11,127 during the 1926 General Strike. Its lowest point was 2,350 in August 1930. Throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, membership fluctuated between these two figures, until in 1937 it reached 12,500 and in 1942, 56,000. Worley, *Class Against Class*, 11, 256, and 315.

<sup>192</sup> Trevor Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes, c.1880-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 269.

<sup>193</sup> Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, 191-92.

local events is vital to its national and international success. The period in which *Love on the Dole* was written was a period of intellectual idealism, industrial unrest, and political ignorance. It was also a period when unemployment and unrest was negatively reported by the conservative press. *Love on the Dole* played a large part in portraying the former and changing the latter.

## II. The Novel

### 1. Reconstructing Salford

In *Love on the Dole*, Walter Greenwood aimed to give a rounded portrait of the Salford in which he was living. *Love on the Dole* satisfies the anthropological interests of socialists, journalists, and politicians by presenting the daily lives of the English working class. By demonstrating the Englishness of the community, Greenwood was able to appeal to the sentiments of the English political class in order to improve the condition of the English working class. The narrative is concentrated on the strained poverty of the 1920s and the mass unemployment of the Depression years of the early 1930s in order to highlight the hardship endured by the English working class. To make this narrative presentation more authentic, the novel also describes the home, leisure, work, and politics of the working-class community. *Love on the Dole* reveals to an outside audience how the people of a working-class community live and how the economic situation forces them to live.

However, Greenwood reconstructed a Salford which fits the aims of his novel. Hanksy Park becomes an ethnically homogenous community, emphasizing its Englishness in order to appeal to the idea of a shared national identity. Although fired by socialist sentiment, Greenwood displayed the conservatism of the English working class in order to enhance the novel's authenticity but also to make the community more appealing and less unsettling to the novel's readership, making it simpler for the working-class community of *Love on the Dole* to fit into an English identity, as well as removing the possibility of having to portray working-class racism.

Greenwood also adapted the cultural activities of the community in order to conform to his socialist ideology and to emphasize the need for escape from working-class

poverty in leisure activities, such as gambling or rambling. Reconstructing the community through the beliefs of a socialist, in *Love on the Dole* gambling is viewed in a negative light whilst rambling is seen as a politically and physically healthy exercise. Despite appearing to present an authentic version of a working-class community, his reconstruction omits aspects which do not seem to interest him. Sport, one of the main and most passionate leisure activities the working class were involved in, both as participants and spectators, is absent apart from a brief allusion to the fact that “they [the men] went to football matches” (*LD*, 74). Instead, Greenwood used leisure activities such as gossiping to demonstrate a community united through common culture, activities which tie both the life of the community and the plot of the novel. In scenes at the snooker hall and in scenes that show the unemployed walking the streets, the novel also reveals a community unable to reap the full benefits of regional and English culture.

Gambling and gossiping are two leisure activities which are described in detail throughout the novel. *Love on the Dole* presents vivid accounts of these aspects of Salford life, but they are also twisted to accommodate the plot and Greenwood’s own propagandist intentions. Greenwood’s portrait echoes Salford life quite accurately, yet Salford life is reconstructed to play an integral role in the plot and themes of the novel.

### (a) Gambling

Greenwood highlights the gambling culture in *Love on the Dole* to indicate how an English working-class community is forced to rely on criminality in order to preserve itself. He does so by presenting an authentic account of local gambling activities, but emphasizes its negative aspects in deference to socialist anti-gambling rhetoric and also in order to appeal to its readership to provide a positive, legal, and secure means of escape

from poverty. Greenwood uses the local, illicit bookmaker Sam Grundy as one of the key characters in *Love on the Dole*, making him the novel's wealthiest and most important figure. Grundy is described as "a small fat man, broad set, with beady eyes, an apoplectic complexion . . . . Preposterous-sized diamonds ornamented his thick fingers and a cable-like gold guard, further enhanced by a collection of gold pendants, spade guineas, and Masonic emblems" (*LD*, 113); he "promised sudden wealth as a prize, deeper poverty as a penalty" (*LD*, 24). Prompted by "the distaste for gambling expressed by many Labour leaders from the turn of the century," Greenwood portrays Grundy as corrupt, sleazy, and highly successful.<sup>194</sup> Demonstrating the inadequacies and failings of the national political and economic system, Grundy provides the only means of escape and work for Hanky Park's inhabitants. This escape is illicit, a form of degrading prostitution which the state has forced the characters into.

In Flynn's local history of Hanky Park, none of the back-street bookies is recalled so negatively, but their wealth is apparent and Greenwood's account is largely accurate. One bookmaker, Jimmy Downing, "was so successful that he ended up owning three bookmaker's shops and two racehorses."<sup>195</sup> The presence of a back-street bookmaker and the significance of his role in *Love on the Dole* is part of the novel's successful authenticity, for "the back entry bookmaker is a central figure in neighbourhood life from the early part of the century until the 1950s."<sup>196</sup> Flynn names five bookies active in Hanky Park and in the 1930s it was "estimated that there were 200 bookmakers' pitches in the city."<sup>197</sup> Manchester and Salford made up one of the biggest gambling areas in the country. In 1934, there were 414 illegal gambling convictions in Salford compared to 77

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<sup>194</sup> Andrew Davies, *Leisure, Gender, and Poverty: Working-Class Culture in Salford and Manchester 1900-1939* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992), 154.

<sup>195</sup> Flynn, *Hanky Park*, 35.

<sup>196</sup> Davies, *Leisure, Gender, and Poverty*, 144.

<sup>197</sup> Flynn, *Hanky Park*, 35 and Davies, *Leisure, Gender, and Poverty*, 145.

in the almost identically-sized Cardiff.<sup>198</sup> Gambling was subject to severe legislation. Seen as a working-class vice which, like drink, served to increase poverty, there was great pressure from moral campaigners and legislation from politicians to prevent working-class gambling: “... the 1906 Street Betting Act was specifically designed to stamp out cash betting on horse races as practised in the ‘artisan’ districts. In contrast, betting at the racecourses, or on credit through licensed bookmakers, patronized by upper- and middle-class gamblers, was given legal sanction.”<sup>199</sup> Greenwood makes clear that this is not so much a working-class vice, but a common leisure activity. The vice is in Grundy’s treatment of his customers, his abuse of the system, and the government’s role in forcing the working class to turn to such a financially risky activity.

Greenwood describes Sam Grundy’s illegal methods in detail, adding further layers of authenticity to his portrait of a working-class community. When Harry Hardcastle wins his three-penny bet he goes to the back entry of a local house, where Grundy’s business is conducted away from the prying eyes of the police. Flynn backs up Greenwood’s account: “The dodge in those days was to use someone else’s house to take bets, and then pay any winners out in the kitchen.”<sup>200</sup> Robert Roberts also recalls that, “The bookmakers in our district ... usually did business standing on a chair behind a locked back-yard door,” echoing Greenwood’s portrait of Grundy handing out Harry’s winnings in the back yard standing on “a small, upturned box” (*LD*, 113).<sup>201</sup>

Grundy’s position in the Hanky Park community is immense, akin to that of a gangster. Apart from the ostentatious style of his dress, he pays the police to stay away, he pays the fines his runners receive, and he is able to procure jobs for those he needs to please. This is seen most tellingly in the climax to the novel, but also when Grundy

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<sup>198</sup> Davies, *Leisure, Gender, and Poverty*, 151; Salford’s population in 1934 was 223,400.

<sup>199</sup> Davies, *Leisure, Gender, and Poverty*, 142.

<sup>200</sup> Flynn, *Hanky Park*, 35.

<sup>201</sup> Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century* (London: Penguin, 1990 [1971]), 164. Henceforth abbreviated *CS*.

manages to get the violent Ned Narkey a job as a policeman in order to keep him happy. This corrupt aspect to Grundy is described more politely and positively by Mark Clapson, who states that “many bookmakers were important contributors to local economic and social life,” as they regularly bought drinks, allowed bets on credit, or helped people on the means test, as well as providing much-needed employment to those out of work.<sup>202</sup> Recollections of Salford bookmakers contradict Greenwood’s negative portrait, for “bookmakers were renowned for offering help to those who suffered injuries at work, and [they] maintained a ... reputation for altruism.”<sup>203</sup> Furthermore, Clapson suggests that the bookmakers described in *Love on the Dole*, *The Classic Slum*, and by Mass-Observation are grotesque stereotypes “to justify [the] pre-conceptions” of the writers and anti-gambling organizations.<sup>204</sup> Both Clapson and Roberts (whose portrait of local bookmakers is more layered than Clapson implies) suggest that gambling could be a road to literacy, as the need to read the newspapers’ tips made “the need for basic education ... urgent” and gave children, when helping their elders, the opportunity to practise their reading and handwriting (*CS*, 164). However, Roberts also relates the mixed feelings bookmakers aroused in his community: “Through their known affluence bookmakers held position of importance among us ... but their ‘morals’, flash suits and bedecked wives (*they* never wore shawls and clogs) usually put them beyond the pale of proper respectability” (*CS*, 36-37).

Harry Hardcastle, like most of the other men in the novel, bets regularly, as it “was about the only way, other than theft, that the worker knew of to get money without earning it” (*CS*, 163). As an apprentice he spends time running bets for the factory workers, one of whom wins the tidy sum of £5. On one occasion, Harry himself wins

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<sup>202</sup> Mark Clapson, “Playing the System: The World of Organized Street Betting in Manchester, Salford, and Bolton,” in *Workers’ Worlds: Cultures and Communities in Manchester and Salford 1880-1939*, eds. Andrew Davies and Steven Fielding (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1992). See also Davies, *Leisure, Gender, and Poverty*, 152.

<sup>203</sup> Davies, *Leisure, Gender, and Poverty*, 155.

<sup>204</sup> Clapson, “Playing the System,” in Davies and Fielding, *Workers’ Worlds*, 170.

£22. Harry's winnings are spent on his family and a trip to the seaside, echoing the experience of Joe Toole, Manchester's first Labour Mayor, whose father once won a large bet: "We all had new clothes out of it, suits for the boys, and frocks for the girls. Mother had a new dress, father had a new suit, and we all had a trip to Blackpool. It was the first time I had seen the sea."<sup>205</sup>

Gambling was not confined to back-street bookies, however, as the newspapers ran many racing columns. From late-Victorian times onwards, Manchester had a large, popular sporting press, providing racing tips for their readers, who avidly read the papers "to consult the inspired prophecy of the tipster journalists" (*LD*, 228). Roberts recalls "an uncle who spent most of his leisure sprawled on a sofa with the handicap book" and the "flood of cheap print devoted entirely to racing form and tipsters' views and forecasts" (*CS*, 163-64). There were many objections to this craze. Along with various anti-gambling organizations' disgust, the communist *Daily Worker* removed racing tips from the paper, in protest at what it perceived to be a capitalist sport. This "militant communist theory clashed sharply with the actualities of the workers' lives and interests," as can be seen by the centrality of gambling to the lives of the characters in *Love on the Dole*.<sup>206</sup> Greenwood shares this disgust for gambling, but realizes its important role in working-class communities. Unlike the *Daily Worker*, Greenwood does not allow socialist ideology to prevent an authentic presentation of working-class life. This accounts for Greenwood's greater success in appealing to a wider readership. It shows to that readership an author able to present the many different aspects of his community; by demonstrating the supposed authenticity of his account, Greenwood successfully gains sympathy for the characters – the English working class – who are caught up in a gambling culture.

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<sup>205</sup> Joseph Toole, *Fighting Through Life* (London: Rich & Cowan, 1935), 56; quoted in Clapson, "Playing the System," in Davies and Fielding, *Workers' Worlds*, 173.

<sup>206</sup> Worley, *Class Against Class*, 241.



Greenwood's portrait of Grundy may indeed be prompted by an anti-gambling sentiment, but nevertheless he recognizes the centrality of gambling in the community and perceives gambling as one of the few possible means of escape from the Salford slum. Escape figures throughout the novel: escape through gambling, through crime, to the countryside. Greenwood damns the system by stating that life under the dole and the means test which the poor are forced to endure limits the possibility of escape to the former two.

### (b) Gossiping

“Women enjoyed substantially fewer opportunities for leisure, and this surely indicates that women's living standards were significantly lower than those of their husbands.”<sup>207</sup>

One of the few leisure activities open to women was gossiping with their neighbours. This provided local women with the opportunity for socializing and allowed them to keep abreast of developments in the community, all for free. Whereas men would usually gather in the pub, women were forced to socialize in the street, outside their front doors, over the back fence, or inside their homes. A woman's role in a working-class community was quite clear. Centred on domestic chores, it involved keeping the house clean, looking after the children and cooking the meals. Thus, gossiping was seen as a disruptive, idle activity, distracting women from their important household tasks. However, as Melanie Tebbutt argues, gossiping was an essential verbal skill women needed to survive; rather than the caricature of “hysterical aberration,” it was an

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<sup>207</sup> Davies, *Leisure, Gender, and Poverty*, 1.

important expression of “anger, worry and frustration.”<sup>208</sup> Furthermore, it gave power and importance to a woman in her community.

The importance of “gossips” to the community in *Love on the Dole* is seen in the figures of Mrs Bull, Dorbell, Jike, and Nattle. Greenwood is presenting through the novel the working-class community of Hanky Park and the old women are another form of explanation which Greenwood uses, acting as an expert commentary for the reader’s benefit. We learn of political opinions, the norms of respectability, and the local customs through the words and actions of these four old women.

The social network which centres on the women is complicated and interweaves throughout the action of the novel. Between them, they act as midwife, layer-out, pawnbroker emissaries, the link between the workhouse and the respectable poor, clairvoyant, and illicit seller of spirits. Providing these services binds the community together. Gossip could give “a sense of belonging, security and friendship.”<sup>209</sup>

Alternatively, gossip could exclude those who fell short of the levels of respectability, for it was “frequently a conservative and restraining influence upon community behaviour” and in the characters of the four old women, we see political and social conservatism.<sup>210</sup>

However, despite their condemnation of Sally’s liaison with Sam Grundy, they are also begrudgingly accepting of its financial necessity, as they are of Harry’s girlfriend’s pregnancy. Indeed, they often argue against marriage on practical, financial grounds. This mixture of moral, conservative disapprobation and practical acceptance is characteristic of the way the novel plays with contrasting clichés, echoed by the moral ambiguity in Roberts’ recollection: “If a single girl had a baby she lowered ... the social standing of her family”; yet, “Strangely enough, those who dwelt together unmarried ... came in for little criticism” (CS, 47).

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<sup>208</sup> Melanie Tebbutt, “Women’s Talk: Gossip and ‘Women’s Worlds’ in Working-Class Communities, 1880-1939,” in Davies and Fielding, *Workers’ Worlds*, 52-53.

<sup>209</sup> Tebbutt, “Women’s Talk,” in Davies and Fielding, *Workers’ Worlds*, 56.

<sup>210</sup> Tebbutt, “Women’s Talk,” in Davies and Fielding, *Workers’ Worlds*, 58.

Robert Roberts's portrayal of the role gossips played is a little spicier than Greenwood's. He describes how "manners and morals were arraigned before a massed public tribunal . . . . Then later, heads together and from evidence submitted, they made grim readjustments on the social ladder" (CS, 24-25). A family's position in the community depended on how respectable their neighbours found them and it was the women who acted as harshest judges. Beyond providing a loose centre for the community's activities, Roberts declares that, "Over our community the matriarchs stood guardians, but not creators, of the group conscience . . . trading with goodwill, candour or cattishness the detailed gossip of a closed society" (CS, 42). This is similar to *Love on the Dole*, with the difference that Roberts' gossips have children and grandchildren as an outlet for their morals. As in *Love on the Dole*, "they of course represented an ultra-conservative bloc in the community" (CS, 43). Perhaps the most shocking aspect of *Love on the Dole* is how it subverts this moral conservatism. At the end of the novel, Sally Hardcastle walks off with her rich lover, defying the community's censoriousness. For the first time in the novel, shame at what the neighbours might think and say is absent.

### (c) Ethnicity

The fabric of the working-class community described in *Love on the Dole* demonstrates how Greenwood alters important aspects of 1930s Salford to make the novel more accessible to its readers. Rather than representing a ethnically heterogeneous community made up of the English (Protestant), Irish (Catholic), and Jewish working classes, Greenwood creates a community made up entirely of the English working class. The absence of non-English characters significantly alters the construct of the novel, devalues its authenticity, and yet makes its apparent authenticity easier for a metropolitan

readership to accept. This absence removes intraclass conflict and presents a community united by its ethnicity and poverty. In effect, Greenwood is not representing his own Salford community, but the English working class in general. This results in a more polemical novel, a call to arms to the rest of England to save itself and its fellow countrymen from the horrors of the Great Depression. In this section, I examine the ethnic formation of Manchester and Salford, attitudes to ethnicity which Greenwood is inheriting, and the manner in which and reasons why Greenwood alters the ethnicity of the novel's working-class community.

“Manchester and Salford were built on the sweat of migrant labour.”<sup>211</sup> These migrants came from all over the country, particularly from rural areas. With the great urbanization and industrialization of England in the nineteenth century, people flocked to the industrial centres such as Manchester in search of definite work. Gaskell describes these experiences in *Mary Barton*, particularly in the character of Old Alice, who came to Manchester as a young girl from northern Lancashire, to which she longs in vain to return. She details her experience, a common one:

There was more mouths at home than could be fed. Tom ... had come to Manchester, and sent word what terrible lots of work was to be had, both for lads and lasses. So father sent George first ... . And George wrote as how wages were far higher in Manchester than Milnthorpe or Lancaster; and, lasses, I was young and thoughtless, and thought it was a fine thing to go so far from home. ... mother said little, and that little was very quiet. ... and I seen her looking after me down the lane as long as I were in sight, with her hand shading her eyes – and that were the last time I ever had look on her.<sup>212</sup>

There was great migration from abroad also, Irish, Jewish, and German in particular. The latter were usually businessmen setting up firms in Manchester (and other northern cities such as Bradford): “By 1870, there were about 150 German business houses in the city. The community was always small but dynamic” (*M*, 162). The German community in Manchester was economically, as well as culturally, influential, despite its size. The

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<sup>211</sup> Dave Haslam, *Manchester, England: The Story of the Pop Cult City* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), 5.

<sup>212</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton* (Oxford: World's Classics, 1987 [1848]), 33.

great majority of migrants to Manchester have, however, been poor workers, such as the Irish and Jews.

In earlier accounts of Salford, the Irish and Jews are keenly described. Though understanding of the rural environment from which the Irish have moved, in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844) Engels has little good to say of them. Irish immigration to the great industrial centres of Britain was extremely common: 15% of Manchester's population in 1851 was Irish (M, 121).<sup>213</sup> Coming from rural poverty, they were prepared to work for much less than English workers, bringing the average wage down. As described in *North and South*, they were also often used as strike-breakers. This was the harsh economic situation, but Engels goes much further in his damning description of the Irish:

The worst dwellings are good enough for them ... . What does such a race want with high wages? The worst quarters of all the large towns are inhabited by Irishmen. Whenever a district is distinguished for especial filth and especial ruinousness, the explorer may safely count on meeting chiefly those Celtic faces. ... In short, the Irish have... discovered the minimum of the necessities of life, and are now making the English acquainted with it. Filth and drunkenness, too, they have brought with them.<sup>214</sup>

Such descriptions appear throughout Engels's polemic, which is broadly sympathetic to the English working class and the conditions in which they are forced to live. Engels's description of an Irishman's filth, drunkenness, and laziness (fine in Ireland but not in England) echoes a common stereotype. Priestley's account of the northern working class was also engagingly sympathetic, yet, when visiting Liverpool, he too lets off vitriolic steam against the Irish:

If ... it is found possible to return her [Ireland's] exiled citizens ... what a fine exit of ignorance and dirt and drunkenness and disease. ... the Irishman in England too often cuts a very miserable figure. He has lost his peasant virtues, whatever they are, and has acquired no others. ... But the English of this class generally make some attempt to live as decently as they can under these conditions ... . the Irish appear in general to have never tried; they have settled in the nearest poor quarter and turned it into a slum, or, finding a slum, have promptly settled down to out-slum it. (EJ, 248-49)

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<sup>213</sup> Around 40,000 – Engels, *Condition of the English Working Class*, 123.

<sup>214</sup> Engels, *Condition of the English Working Class*, 124.

Both Engels's and Priestley's anti-Irish sentiment is cloaked in economic fact. However, attitudes towards the Irish were more often provoked by religious sectarianism, which meant that the Irish often formed separate communities: "Irish migrant groups in British cities lived in an environment of cultural as well as economic insecurity... and nurtured an identity that was defiantly Irish and Catholic" (*M*, 122). The sectarian sentiment is well described by Roberts. He notices "little open hostility," but that "religious prejudice was deeply ingrained":

About one fifth of the inhabitants of our village were Roman Catholic, and nearly all came from the lower ranks of the community: their going to church had no social value among us whatsoever. ... Protestants held a series of beliefs about the "Micks" which for the most part precluded any genuine friendship between them. People assured one another in the shop [Roberts' parents' corner shop], I remember, that nearly all Roman Catholics were dirty and ignorant and even the cleaner ones could not be trusted. When a member of the faith new to the district came in to buy, customers in the shop would nod and mouth at one another – "Catholic!" (*CS*, 170)

Roberts repeats the phrase *Roman Catholic*; much of the antagonism against Catholics was that their loyalty lay not with the monarch, but with the Pope. The Irish, quite simply, were not *English*, and would not have a picture of Queen Victoria on the kitchen wall. They were also more likely to vote Labour, whilst the English working class often voted Tory, party of the Empire.

Whilst the Irish lived in, yet in many ways separate from, English communities, the Jewish community established itself largely in Lower Broughton, the other side of the River Irwell from Hanky Park, as well as in areas of Manchester, where they formed the largest Jewish population outside of London (*M*, 122). As with the Irish, the Jews found themselves in the poorer areas of Salford and Manchester, with their own separate secular and religious institutions, which kept them largely separate from English communities. This produced anti-Semitic sentiment, such as the *Manchester City News's* description in 1890 of "an invading force, foreign in race, speech, dress, ideas and religion" (*M*, 124). Roberts recalls the Salford Jews living "in a poverty so appalling that it shocked even us." This poverty also provoked anti-Semitic feeling at the

“contamination,” as “[our own poor] sensed the menace of a horde of hungry foreigners seeking to share in charities which, they felt, as true-born Britons belonged to them alone” (CS, 171). Again, as with the Irish, there was the feeling that the Jews were not English or British.

Roberts also remembers his mother, who clearly had socialist sympathies, being kind to an old Jewish man. In the 1930s, many Jews were prominent in the communist movement, which provided a crossover between communities, as recalled by Ewan MacColl. Contrary to the above accounts, MacColl does not “remember any anti-Semitism ... any ‘natural’ ... segregation,” although he states that the Jewish children in his school lived in a ghetto. Joining the YCL “initiated him into the Jewish way of life” and “helped one overcome any residual feelings of hostility.”<sup>215</sup> Many Jews were members of the Communist Party, in part because of the anti-Semitism inherent in fascism.

The working class of 1930s Salford was heterogeneous, incorporating a large Irish and Jewish immigrant community, quite different from that presented in the novel, which presents a homogenous English working-class community. As I noted before, Stephen Constantine argues that the presentation of “a virtual single-class society” is designed to appease the novel’s middle-class readers, pointing out that “the story does not contain middle-class villains” and “makes no attempt to suggest that the middle class were responsible for unemployment.” It is certainly true that this is what distinguishes the novel from a more polemically socialist novel, for example *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. However, the community in *Love on the Dole* is not simply “single class.” The pawnbroker Price lives on a far higher social scale, as does the bookmaker Sam Grundy, out of the city in Cheshire with a cottage in Wales. Constantine states that “the services they [i.e. Price and Grundy] provided made them part of that working-class

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<sup>215</sup> MacColl, “Theatre of Action,” in Samuel, *Theatres of the Left*, 207 and 217.

community and not potentially class enemies.”<sup>216</sup> This ignores the resentment many of the novel’s characters feel towards those seen to be profiting from their poverty. Grundy offers “sudden wealth as a prize, deeper poverty as a penalty ... temporary relief at the expense of further entanglement” (*LD*, 33). Grundy offers escape to the inhabitants of Hanky Park, but it is an escape based on degradation and illicit behaviour, not the escape of socialism or literacy.

Greenwood concentrates *Love on the Dole* entirely in Hanky Park and rarely leaves the area, apart from excursions to the countryside and seaside. This results in a presentation not simply of a single-class society but also of a single-ethnic society. Only Mrs Jike, a Cockney, is from outside Hanky Park. This absence removes intraclass conflict and any possible portrayal of working-class racism. It allows Greenwood to give a positive presentation of the English working class to emphasize the injustice of the poverty they are forced to suffer. The novel contains just two villains – Sam Grundy and Ned Narkey, bookmaker and policeman respectively, villainy which adheres to a socialist antagonism towards policemen and gambling. Almost everyone else in the novel is a victim of some sort and Greenwood does not cloud their victimhood with negative traits.

In significantly altering the ethnic and social construct of Hanky Park, Greenwood allows himself to concentrate fully on, for him, the more important issue of industrial poverty and the unfulfilled potential of political representation. For a novel whose immediate selling point is its authenticity, this is a neat and clever twist. By concentrating so closely on a closed, single-ethnic community, Greenwood can reveal and represent the culture of the English working class to appeal to the conscience of a middle-class and metropolitan readership. The community’s Englishness makes it possible for it to form part of a national identity. It also accounts for the community’s political conservatism; “the enduring influence religious and ethnic allegiances exerted over voting behaviour”

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<sup>216</sup> Constantine, “*Love on the Dole* and Its Reception in the 1930s,” in *Literature and History* 8:2, 237.



meant that the Irish Catholic vote in general around Lancashire “constituted the most consistent and reliable body of support for Labour throughout the period.”<sup>217</sup>

## 2. Politics: “Apathy, docility, deference”

Political indifference and ignorance are at the centre of *Love on the Dole*. When political feelings are reluctantly expressed, it is usually a form of conservatism, rather than socialism. *Love on the Dole* was written after the dramatic collapse of the 1929-1931 Labour government, which led to the desertion of Ramsay MacDonald and the formation of the National Government. Like most of the country, Salford’s three constituencies had elected Conservative MPs in the 1931 election.<sup>218</sup> Indeed, Labour’s political success in the interwar years was gradual and subject to many setbacks. The years after the war saw an increase in the vote for Labour, arguably because of an extension of the franchise to women (over the age of twenty-eight) and to single men, though as Trevor Griffiths has argued it is hard to quantify exactly the nature of Labour’s limited increase in the vote after the war. But by 1929, with the election of Labour, “incontrovertible evidence appeared to exist that a wholesale shift in party allegiances had occurred.”<sup>219</sup> Furthermore, Labour had extended its vote beyond religious allegiances so that “the transition to class-based political allegiances appeared significantly more advanced by 1929 than it had in the immediate post-war years.”<sup>220</sup> But the collapse of the Labour government and of the party’s support in 1931 indicated that that transition was not as secure or deep as was thought: “A solid bloc of Labour votes had still to be

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<sup>217</sup> Trevor Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes, c.1880-1930*, 300 and 317.

<sup>218</sup> Salford was divided into three constituencies, West, North, and South. In parliamentary elections between the wars, Salfords West and South only had a Labour MP in 1923-1924 and 1929-1931 and Salford North from 1917-24 and 1929-31. See Kidd, *Manchester*, 207, for a breakdown of voting patterns in Manchester in the interwar years.

<sup>219</sup> Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes*, 305.

<sup>220</sup> Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes*, 306.

constructed by the early 1930s. ... the transition to class-based allegiances remained substantially incomplete. Support, which the party was capable of harnessing in the short term, had still to be translated into a long-term commitment to Labour's cause."<sup>221</sup>

Greenwood does not adhere to an idealistic view of working-class allegiance to either Labour or socialism, which means that the greatest challenge for Greenwood is to match his socialist politics with the conservatism of the English working class. Wishing to represent his class and his community, he is reluctant to damn working-class political ignorance. This clash results in an awkward contradiction and prevents the novel from becoming the socialist polemic that many on the Left wished for. This fictional difficulty is echoed in the novel by socialist Larry Meath's frustration at his inability to represent his community due to its political indifference. This fictional and political awkwardness adds to the novel's authenticity in describing a closed, conservative community. It allows Greenwood to reveal the power of the First World War in English cultural memory and the conservative nostalgia which prevented radical working-class socialism. Rather than this being a means of pandering to middle-class values, as Constantine contends, it is drawn more from personal experience, an emphasis on individual over collective suffering, and a lack of radical politics among the working class. This is characteristic of 1930s working-class fiction, for, as Croft writes, "Few writers tried to represent unemployment as a radicalising experience."<sup>222</sup>

In working-class accounts of working-class political feeling, this issue has been addressed and well explained. In *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and *The Classic Slum*, this conservatism is explained as a mixture of "apathy, docility and deference" (CS, 168). Rather than rising up in rebellion, the working class are seen as holding a deferential attitude towards their "betters," as well as feeling a sense of impotence. Roberts describes the unskilled workers in his area as "politically illiterate": "The less they had to

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<sup>221</sup> Griffiths, *The Lancashire Working Classes*, 307-308.

<sup>222</sup> Croft, *Red Letter Days*, 111.

conserve the more conservative in spirit they showed themselves. ... It was their belief ... that the middle and upper classes with their better intelligence and education had a natural right to think and act on behalf of the rest, a right that one should not even question" (CS, 167). Roberts concludes that despite the progress the labour movement had made at the turn of the century, "socialism continued to make little appeal to the lower working class" (CS, 177).

Tressell is as aware and understanding of working-class conservatism as Roberts, but more disdainful. He feels that this conservatism comes from a wilful political ignorance, fed by the Tory papers. Just as the jingoistic *Daily Express* is avidly read and cited in *Love on the Dole*, so the workers read and rely on the fictitious *Obscurer*. Tressell's workers unquestioningly repeat what they read, having their views fixed on topics of which they have a hazy knowledge:

Easton was still reading the *Obscurer*: he was not about to understand exactly what the compiler of the figures was driving at – probably the latter never intended that anyone should understand – but he was conscious of a growing feeling of indignation and hatred against foreigners of every description, who were ruining this country, and he began to think that it was about time we did something to protect ourselves. Still, it was a very difficult question: to tell the truth, he himself could not make head or tail of it.<sup>223</sup>

Despite the breakthrough of a parliamentary Labour party, the situation in *Love on the Dole* is little different. Only six years after the end of the First World War, Labour formed its first government, evidence of a growing working-class political awareness and a lessening deference. However, by the time of the slump, Labour's parliamentary representation had been demolished and the working class remained financially insecure. Instead of provoking a political awareness, the characters often respond: "Vote for none on 'em" (LD, 33). Pamela Fox describes "the narrator's open contempt" for the community's "lack of consciousness," yet *Love on the Dole* documents the natural conservatism and Conservatism, married with political indifference and ignorance, of the

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<sup>223</sup> Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Flamingo, 1993 [unabridged paperback edition, 1965; first abridged edition, 1914]), 21.

unskilled working class, which Greenwood contrasts, in overly simplistic terms, with the socialism of Larry Meath, a skilled worker.<sup>224</sup>

Greenwood wishes to represent his community; he also, through his socialism, wishes to change that community. In *Love on the Dole*, he does not quite balance these two concerns. His community's nostalgic, patriotic conservatism prevents the political representation that socialists wished for in order to morally represent their working-class communities. Greenwood's problem is that, as his working-class community is unable to take advantage of their new political freedom, he is stepping out of his community in order to speak on their behalf. This accounts for his decision to target a metropolitan audience instead. Rather than writing a socialist polemic such as *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, he writes a novel which does not frighten the establishment. At the same time, however, this description of a conservative community is more authentic than communist or socialist rhetoric.

Mrs Bull is the only one of the old women to have sympathy with Larry's socialism and to support Sally's decision to go off with Sam Grundy. She converts a general dissatisfaction with the death of so many young working-class men into a political dissatisfaction: "Them as start wars should be made t' go'n fight 'um. An' if *Ab'd* owt t' do wi' it, fight 'um they would. They'd tek no lad o' mine" (*LD*, 75). However, Mrs Bull's comment is unusual. The other three old women are uniformly patriotic. This is not surprising, for "patriotism and royalism remained stronger factors in the English working class than a socialism which was still perceived by many as the province of intellectuals and the upper classes."<sup>225</sup>

One of the gossips, Mrs Jike, dates "the world's decay from the time of the passing of Victoria the Good" (*LD*, 37), whilst another, Mrs Nattle, has hanging on her wall "Queen Victoria, in a chipped picture frame with a broken glass" (*LD*, 105). In

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<sup>224</sup> Fox, *Class Fictions*, 82.

<sup>225</sup> Ayers, *English Literature of the 1920s*, 103.

Edwardian times too, Victoria “sat plump and unsmiling in oleograph on innumerable slum walls” (CS, 140). This adherence to Victoria in the 1930s shows a patriotism, a belief in the Empire, and a nostalgia, as expressed by Mrs Dorbell: “*Daily Express* is right. ’Taint been same since war. Before *that* started things *was* reasonable” (LD, 33). Although this sentiment voices a yearning for prewar licensing laws, it is characteristic of the nostalgia that permeates the community.

The harking back to the war provokes mixed feelings of nostalgia, anger, and fear. These are reactions to the current dire situation which complicates this patriotism. George V is not mentioned in the novel; it is towards Victoria, whose long, defining reign ended with the coming of the new century, that they, the older generation, look. But it is not only a time when Victoria reigned which they nostalgically yearn for, but, more simply, a time before the First World War. This was a war which finally broke down working-class subservience to their “betters.”

The younger generation’s attitude towards the recent war can be separated into those who fought in it and those with the uneasy feeling that it could have been them. Ned Narkey is the only main character in the novel described as having fought. Narkey is an unsympathetic character, a brutal womanizer, a reactionary, and a policeman. His attitude towards Larry Meath is antagonistic, mainly because of his desire towards Sally Hardcastle, but also because of Larry’s politics. Socialism in the 1930s was associated with pacifism, which was easily labelled as cowardice or non-patriotism. Narkey draws on this to attack Larry, directing the anger of a soldier towards those he considers lacking in patriotism: “Ah fought for such bastards as you. Sergeant-major Narkey, that’s me. Aye, an Ah wus o’er there while yellow-bellied rats like you wus sleepin’ wi’ owld sweats’ wives an’ landin’ soft jobs for y’selves” (LD, 135).

But his attitude is also fuelled by a lack of reward for his wartime heroics. The First World War had freed the working class from a subservience towards their superiors, but

not made them economically independent. For one who risked his life, Narkey feels that he has not received his due reward or recognition: an unemployed man with no prospect of work trapped in a loveless marriage is not the reward he was expecting. His economic impotence is masked by a violent temper, also provoked by Sam Grundy, the prosperous bookmaker, whose affluence makes Narkey, and others, resentful: “Blind hate and envy dominated him; his impulse was to snatch at Grundy’s throat, fling him to the floor and kick his brains out as he had done those German boys, who, scared stiff, he had captured in a pill-box, a feat of heroism which had earned him the medal and the commander’s commendatory remarks” (*LD*, 188).

The contrast between Narkey’s military prowess (regained with the job of policeman which Grundy attains for him) and his financial impotence is echoed by Harry Hardcastle’s naïve musings on war and manhood, part of a slow, dim awakening of his political consciousness. Finally realizing the insecurity of the terms of his employment, he looks around and sees a generation slightly older than him who fought in the war “mouching around the streets, threadbare and unemployed” (*LD*, 91) and understands that a similar fate awaits him. He also wonders what it means exactly to be a man. He cannot consider himself a man, as he earns boy’s wages, faces the bleak prospect of unemployment, and the consequent inability to build a home. His consciousness of being officially a man, instead of inciting a feeling of pride, provokes fear at the sense of responsibility and insecurity: “Why, those soldiers had only been three years older than he. They were men at nineteen, then. Had he been their contemporary he, too, would have been a soldier; a corpse, probably, in some foreign land. He shivered” (*LD*, 75). His fear and Narkey’s anger show a change in attitude from prewar patriotism to an insecure self-questioning and a loss of identity.

Harry’s political musings are confused and naïve. As he struggles to come to terms with his devalued, insecure masculinity, he tries to find a political solution to the

problems he is experiencing. He looks towards others rather than to himself for the easy solution. He reads the newspapers, believing their slogans: “Prosperity in sight. Trade turning the corner” (*LD*, 90), Greenwood once again showing working-class political ignorance fed by newspaper sloganeering. He also turns to Larry Meath, but is afraid of Larry’s hard answers, which he has trouble understanding. Harry has neither control of, nor insight into, his situation and the causes of it. He is baffled by “this ‘Means Test’ which Larry Meath had been warning everybody about” and “something called the National Government”; all in all, “He could reason no further than an uneasy dissatisfaction of the mind which told him that something was wickedly wrong in such a state of affairs” (*LD*, 178).

Harry’s involvement in the demonstration on Bexley Square again reveals his political confusion. Like many of the workers on the march, he feels a mixture of “bewilderment” and “resentment” (*LD*, 199), as well as excitement at for once being able to give expression to his frustration. However, once the march has ended, he is conscious of “his guilt in having been one of the demonstrators” (*LD*, 206). He is an accidental participant, carried away by the moment, but unable to solidify his political confusion into a fixed ideology. Greenwood refuses to shape the novel as the awakening of a socialist conscience in order to appeal to a metropolitan readership but also because to do so would interfere with the novel’s authenticity.

The stagnant political confusion seen in Harry Hardcastle makes it impossible for an attempt at socialist representation to succeed, as is seen in the attempts of Larry Meath. Larry is distinguished from his workmates and neighbours by his speech, education, and politics. He is *Love on the Dole*’s only socialist, although his politics are not as clearly defined as Frank Owen’s in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*; his socialist sentiments largely echo common mantras in his three major speeches (*LD*, 86, 181-84, 198). His role in the novel is more interesting than what he says, however. He acts as a kind of clerk to

the illiterate and uneducated (*LD*, 23) and an (unwelcome) guide to the politically ignorant. His role in the community is mainly of a positive nature, despite people's reactions to him. Those who expressed a socialist ideology "were very often the most skilful and knowledgeable hands"; however, they were usually "dubbed 'agitators' or 'red rags'" (*CS*, 178).

This once again reveals the dilemma Greenwood faces in wishing to advocate socialist politics but also to portray an authentic working-class community. In his attempts to represent his community, Larry Meath is the equivalent of Greenwood in the novel. Greenwood lauds Larry for those attempts, describing him eulogistically through the view of Harry Hardcastle: "Larry Meath! Harry's heart leapt and his eyes glowed with eagerness" (*LD*, 22). However, Greenwood seems to make clear that his decision to appeal to a middle-class readership through the medium of fiction is more astute than Larry's failed attempts to speak directly to his community. Larry's "quality of studiousness and reserve elevated him to a plane beyond that of ordinary folk" (*LD*, 22), enabling him to attempt to help them, but always keeping him apart. Sally shares her brother's view of an angelic, ennobled Larry: "Imagine having her name coupled with Larry's" (*LD*, 85), she delightedly thinks to herself. However, their exalted opinion of Larry is not shared by the rest of the community. Furthermore, thinking so highly of Larry merely reflects Sally's low opinion of herself.

In his followers, Larry inspires a socialist desire for self-improvement, which reveals the gap between the educated socialists and the uneducated workers. On meeting Larry, Sally immediately wishes to better herself whilst realizing her own apparent inferiority. In talking to him for the first time, she nervously corrects "nowt" to "anything" (*LD*, 87), and then later, inspired by Larry, she humorously attempts to correct herself again: "Oh, I've not time to muck about – I mean, mend collars for nobody" (*LD*, 89). This gap is indicated when Sally goes on a ramble, organized by the Labour Club, "their



conversation was incomprehensible” as they talked of the “Halley,” “Baytoven,” “Bark,” and “Marks”; she supposes that “they were of a class apart ... who lived in houses where there were baths” (*LD*, 97).

The difference between Sally and the Labour activists in their education, speech, and refinement makes Sally feel ashamed. Others act towards the difference with resentment. I have already noted how this manifests itself in Narkey, but Larry’s politics are continually put down by the other inhabitants of Hanky Park. One of Harry’s friends dismisses him as “a queer bloke ... . He’s barmy, if you ask me” (*LD*, 61); an opinion mainly provoked by Larry’s bird-watching hobby. Even Mrs Hardcastle’s positive opinion of Larry belies more common feelings towards socialists like him: “Ah reckon he’s a gentleman, an’ a credit t’ t’ neighbourhood an’ ne’er heed what folks say about Labour men” (*LD*, 96). Others, such as Mrs Dorbell, merely express a form of wilful apathy: “Ah understands nowt about politics, an’ nowt Ah want t’ understand” (*LD*, 164). Finally, Larry loses his job for chalking a slogan on the factory walls, bringing him down to the level of all the unemployed men he was supposed to be helping.

The educational superiority of Larry is seen not only from below, but also from Larry’s perspective, as he is often seen looking down on the workers with something approaching contempt. This distance between the socialist and the worker undermines any socialist polemic the novel may have and arguably softens the novel for the middle-class reader. His political preaching is delivered with impatient frustration towards those unable or unwilling to understand, until he finally, angrily cries out:

...it’s driving me barmy to have to live among such idiotic folk. There’s no limit to their daftness: won’t think for themselves, won’t do anything to help themselves and.... Augh! Watch them waken up when they get it in the neck with this Means Test. (*LD*, 187)

Like Larry Meath, Greenwood as a writer is above his community, attempting to represent it in order to affect political change. Greenwood implies that his fictional, diluted socialism is more likely to succeed than an ideological stubbornness. Larry’s death

towards the end of the novel indicates his absolute failure to give his working-class community political representation. Pamela Fox describes this failure as revealing that “in daily lived experience ... [working-class] consciousness can be reduced to impotence or a defeated kind of brutality.”<sup>226</sup> Greenwood simultaneously undermines politicized working-class consciousness through Larry’s failure and attacks the demeaning brutality of capitalism. The downbeat, pessimistic ending of *Love on the Dole*, with the death of a socialist and the triumph of crime and capitalism, reflects the abridged ending of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, which on its first publication initially finished with Frank Owen contemplating suicide. The abridgement and changed ending were made after Tressell’s death by the novel’s editors, afraid of the effect the novel would have.<sup>227</sup> By ending with Larry’s death and the bleak triumph of crime with Larry’s death – demonstrating the failure rather than the triumph of socialism – Greenwood makes *Love on the Dole* more palatable to a middle-class readership, highlighting the reasons for its commercial and political success.

### 3. The Authenticity of Language

The divide between the educated, socialist activist and the uneducated, sceptical worker he is aiming to represent is indicated by the language used by Larry Meath and the workers. Chris Hopkins writes that Larry’s educated language “has the effect of contributing to a hierarchy of discourse in which Standard English is seen as a more intelligent and articulate discourse than the dialect form.”<sup>228</sup> This divide differs from the nineteenth century when “many of the leading socialists of Lancashire and Yorkshire

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<sup>226</sup> Fox, *Class Fictions*, 132.

<sup>227</sup> See F. C. Ball, *One of the Damned: The Life and Times of Robert Tressell* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 209-12, for a discussion of the changes made to the first edition of the novel.

<sup>228</sup> Chris Hopkins, “Dialect and Dialectic: Region and Nation in Walter Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole*” in *Literature of Region and Nation* 3:2 (1993), 3.

such as [Allen] Clarke, Ben Turner, and Joseph Burgess were steeped in the dialect,” which was “frequently used in the street literature of Victorian political elections, or in trade union actions.”<sup>229</sup> Larry Meath, however, is well-spoken. Larry’s “blather,” as it is derisively termed by Ned Narkey (*LD*, 85), is grounded in sophisticated argument and educated language. Although the attitudes of both Harry and Sally Hardcastle towards Larry Meath are deferential, demonstrating a high regard for an educated socialist, in general Larry Meath’s argument, language, or delivery fail to appeal to the uneducated worker.

Larry Meath’s inability as a socialist to represent his community indicates the difficulties Greenwood as a novelist also faces. Greenwood does not write to, but about, his class; Larry Meath attempts to speak for and to his class. Greenwood is part of a regional and national and literary and political tradition of representing the speaker’s class and community through a linguistic authenticity. Greenwood’s difficulty in recording the language of his community results from the fact that the tradition has included middle- as well as working-class intellectuals, national as well as regional representation, and conservative as well as socialist ideology. Greenwood attempts to bridge, but also to move on from, these traditions to emphasize the regional and class authenticity of *Love on the Dole*.

Nineteenth-century dialect literature was an attempt to highlight, or even accentuate, the differences between written and spoken English, yet it was not necessarily antithetical to the development of a standard English, as the spelling and grammar of dialect relied on the same rules. Patrick Joyce writes that “[mid-Victorian Manchester] institutions and individuals were certainly influential in marking dialect with a number of the prevailing assumptions concerning language and literature.” Furthermore, dialect literature was just

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<sup>229</sup> Patrick Joyce, “The People’s English,” in *Language, Self and Society: A Social History of Language*, eds. Peter Burke and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 165 and 173.

as concerned in creating a national, British identity, as “[t]he provincial folklorists’ and others’ emphasis on the continuity and integrity of local cultural traditions fed powerfully into the idea of a national culture supposedly rooted in these traditions.”<sup>230</sup>

Dialect literature in the nineteenth century consisted of almanacs, broadsheets, and pamphlets, all concerned with local issues. Most of the dialect poets came from Lancashire, located in particular around the Manchester area (Rochdale, Oldham, Bolton) and Yorkshire. The leading poet/songwriter (most poems were set to music) was Edwin Waugh (1817-90, alternatively known as “Ned Waif”), an extrovert travelling printer from Rochdale, who, like other poets such as Samuel Laycock, wrote poems celebrating local characters, events, and places, elaborately rejoicing in the peculiarities of local words and names. Waugh’s most successful poem was “Come whoam to the childer an’ me” (1856), which was enjoyed by not only the local working class: “Its commendation of marital faithfulness and its sentimentality appealed to contemporary Victorian society” (*DNB*). Indeed, his poetry and aims were not particularly radical. His main, conservative aim was to preserve dialect and although he “demonstrated an acute empathetic understanding of poverty and hardship, [he] has been criticized for his failure to probe complex issues such as unemployment and working conditions in factories and for his lack of sympathy for Chartism and the political aspirations of the working classes” (*DNB*).

The tradition survived well into the twentieth century, most notably with Gracie Fields (1898-1979, popularly known as “Our Gracie,” also from Rochdale), whose enduring popularity, which reached its peak in the 1930s, crossed all classes. In *English Journey*, Priestley feels that in Gracie Fields, “All the qualities [of Lancashire women] are there: shrewdness, homely simplicity, irony, fierce independence, an impish delight in mocking whatever is thought to be affected and pretentious” (*EJ*, 253). The popularity of Gracie

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<sup>230</sup> Joyce, “The People’s English,” in Burke and Porter, *Language, Self and Society*, 168 and 167.

Fields confirms the importance of regional culture to national identity, as well as revealing how classless accents and dialect can be. Priestley admires her for being wonderfully typical of Lancashire folk, yet it was also those qualities which endeared her to the middle and upper classes. Despite her working-class background and strong accent, Gracie Fields's "homely simplicity" and "fierce independence" confirmed a sense of what it was to be British to her broad audience, especially at times of economic depression and war. Further, whereas Walter Greenwood's presentation of unemployment was bleak and pessimistic, Gracie Fields's film *Sing as We Go* (1935) was excessively optimistic. Fields (and also George Formby) made the bleak squalor of unemployment palatable to the more prosperous classes. Both Waugh and Fields were apolitical, not challenging, but indeed confirming, the firm beliefs of the conservative middle class.

This shrewd use of dialect and accent to appeal to a middle-class notion of a national identity was not always shared by socialist politicians. In *Love on the Dole*, Larry Meath is lifted to the role of spokesman because he is a powerful speaker. His command of the language sets him apart from those he is trying to help, creating a feeling of antagonistic unease and resentment. Jonathan Rose relates an incident involving Herbert Morrison, Labour politician and self-declared man of the people:

... after he delivered a speech in Lancashire in 1939, an audience survey [by Mass-Observation] found that it contained more than fifty words not generally understood by those who had left school at fourteen ... . These words included "conceive", "demeaning", "emancipation", "issues", "lineal", "deflected", "evolution", "integral", "pliant", "suppliant" and "fundamental."<sup>231</sup>

Greenwood had to decide in what kind of language he would write: the dialect language of his community or standard English. Greenwood chooses both; the narrator uses standard English, which "seems to imply that the narrator's voice is too identified with a reader who is constructed as an educated, middle class spectator," whereas dialect

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<sup>231</sup> Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, 223.

is reserved for recorded speech, which in turn implies “that dialect is a non-thinking language.”<sup>232</sup> Larry is lifted to the role of spokesperson because he is a powerful speaker. His command of the language sets him apart from those he is trying to help, creating a feeling of bewilderment and antagonistic unease and resentment. In *Love on the Dole*, Greenwood implies that, through the language of fiction, he can represent and change the lot of his class more successfully than through the language of politics. This fictional language, however, is unsure. Following on from D. H. Lawrence, Greenwood wishes to maintain a linguistic authenticity. However, he is explaining a community which is alien to the novel’s readership and Greenwood feels obliged to explain not only dialect words, but any peculiar terms the reader may not understand. Greenwood largely allows the characters to explain their community through their speech, but he also intervenes with his own explanations. For example, at one point Mrs Nettle mentions “ring papers” and Greenwood immediately and clumsily interrupts: “(official documents issued to soldiers’ wives during the Great War enabling them to draw their allowances at the post office)” (*LD*, 34). The parentheses are characteristic of the manner in which Greenwood translates terms. He does not want the authorial voice to interfere directly with the text, but he is worried that the reader may not understand that text. It is, of course, difficult to ascertain exactly what the readers of *Love on the Dole* in the 1930s will have, and will not have, understood, but sometimes the explanations seem unnecessary: “Ar owld man (father)” (*LD*, 56).

Despite his clumsy interventions, he still leaves many dialect words alone. Hopkins argues that in the novel, “Dialect speakers are ... seen as inarticulate victims.”<sup>233</sup> However, Greenwood does allow his characters to speak for themselves in their own voice, which is their only form of power in the novel. Throughout *Love on the Dole*, they are increasingly impoverished, their livelihoods, identities, and respectability taken from

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<sup>232</sup> Hopkins, “Dialect and Dialectic,” in *Literature of Region and Nation* 3:2, 2 and 4.

<sup>233</sup> Hopkins, “Dialect and Dialectic,” in *Literature of Region and Nation* 3:2, 46.

them, but they do keep their language. This linguistic authenticity follows on from Edwin Waugh and Samuel Laycock. Greenwood's use of dialect is symbolically different from the dialect poets, however, for it emphasizes that regional dialect does not make the speaker part of a shared national identity.

In *Love on the Dole* dialect is reserved for the uneducated. Dialect is not the empowering expression of the local community, but a symbol of a voiceless, powerless, jobless workforce, cut off from any notion of a national identity. Greenwood emphasizes the impotence of the community's language by often switching into free and direct speech, loosely translating its thoughts, fears, and feelings into standard English. The poverty of their language is further emphasized by Larry Meath's educated language. The only character in the novel who can articulate the workers' frustrations and feelings of powerlessness speaks in standard English. This distances him from the workers he is trying to represent, whilst also stressing their impotence. Greenwood's use of dialect forms part of his plea to an English metropolitan élite to allow the English working class to become part of a new national identity. It was the Second World War which allowed this to happen, as is seen in the film adaptation of *Love on the Dole*.

#### 4. From Novel to Film

The reception of *Love on the Dole* demonstrates that Greenwood had successfully found his target audience. Middle class and metropolitan, the newspaper reviewers had responded to the novel's subject matter with acclaim. The novel had then been adapted into a play and staged in both Manchester and London, enjoying a long run in the West End, suggesting even further that the audience of *Love on the Dole*, both novel and play, were middle class observers enjoying the drama whilst having their social conscience tapped and roused. The novel's and play's apparent lack of political propaganda appeased

the authorities and reviewers, who could view it as an accurate social document and it passed without censure or censorship. The play ran for 391 performances in the West End thus attracting, “It was claimed ... fully one million people ... before the end of 1935,” including George Orwell and MP Sir Herbert Samuel, who drew the play, and the issues it raised, to Parliament’s attention.<sup>234</sup>

However, the filming of *Love on the Dole* was much more problematic, raising the question of who its target audience was and whom the censors believed the audience would be. Greenwood himself simply noted much later that, “*Love on the Dole* as a play and a film reached a wide audience (many of the extra audiences not given to the habit of book reading).”<sup>235</sup> These different audiences make the nature of the novel and the film quite different. The issue of authenticity becomes one of photographic image rather than fictional and political representation. The novel’s socialist doubts are lost, but filming the adaptation during the war increases, but changes significantly, its propaganda effect.

Although novels and plays were subject to successful censorship and prosecution up until the early 1960s, the rise of the film industry made the issue of censorship central to the medium itself. Novels and plays did not enjoy mass audiences, but films attracted audiences of millions, often working class, young, and female. The British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) declared that they held “the broad general principle that nothing will be passed which is calculated to demoralize the public ... . Consideration has to be given to the impression made on the average audience which includes a not inconsiderable proportion of people of immature judgement.”<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Constantine, “The Reception of *Love on the Dole*,” in *Literature and History* 8:2, 233-34.

<sup>235</sup> Letter, 3 January, 1971. Walter Greenwood Collection. Correspondence. WGP1. University of Salford Library.

<sup>236</sup> Quoted by Jeffrey Richards, “British Film Censorship” in *The British Cinema Book*, ed. Robert Murphy (London: BFI Publishing, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2001), 156.



Censorship was targeted at anything sexually untoward, “banning the depiction of prostitution, premarital and extramarital sex” amongst other things.<sup>237</sup> The Board’s second president, T. P. O’Connor, was responsible for extending a simple ban on nudity to censorship on anything “that can teach methods or extenuate crime, that can undermine the teachings of morality, that tends to bring the institution of marriage in contempt or lower the sacredness of family ties.”<sup>238</sup> The BBFC’s political aims were also conservative, aiming to protect the institutions which keep the moral framework of Britain in order, “[s]o no criticism was permitted of the monarchy, government, church, police, judiciary or friendly foreign governments.”<sup>239</sup>

The subject matter of *Love on the Dole* was harrowing and bleak and subverted the BBFC’s moral and political guidelines quite explicitly. It depicts premarital sex, Sally’s status as a kept woman at the novel’s end is little different from prostitution, and it arguably carries the message that crime pays, honesty suffers. It portrays a working class psychologically beaten to the ground by the authorities’ harsh economic measures and physically beaten to the ground by the police in the march on Bexley Square. Thus, in 1936, a proposed film adaptation of the novel was rejected.

In 1936, the year the Jarrow Marchers walked on London, unemployment was still at one a three quarter million and the means test continued to cause controversy and hardship. The political climate was sensitive to any depiction of unemployment, especially one which portrayed the police in such a negative light. The rejection of the film proposal draws attention to the different audiences it was believed the novel and the film would attract. The novel contained the same scenes the BBFC found objectionable, but its readership was middle class. However, those watching a film of the novel would

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<sup>237</sup> Richards, “British Film Censorship,” in Murphy, *The British Cinema Book*, 156.

<sup>238</sup> Quoted, *ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

be those portrayed on the screen, implying that a working-class audience would be vulnerable to scenes depicting their own poverty.

However, the film did eventually get made, into a piece of wartime propaganda. The outbreak of the Second World War clearly made the question of national security paramount in the making of films. Given the repeated rejections of a film adaptation of *Love on the Dole*, it is initially surprising that the war made the adaptation possible. Wartime British cinema was propagandist in tone, but, due to the British people's everyday involvement in the war, "film makers were dealing with a 'psychologically aware audience'" and they could not "use the war as material for melodrama." There was "an absence of blatant heroics, jingoistic self-display, and the projection of a national image of reticence, wry humour and stolid determination," as can be seen in a film such as *Brief Encounter* (1945).<sup>240</sup> The implication is that the working-class audiences of the 1930s were not politically or artistically mature enough to appreciate the cinematic handling of their own experiences. However, the new wartime situation meant that the film version of *Love on the Dole* could not be condescending in its attitude to the working class. It also had to be subtle in its use of 1930s working-class poverty as wartime propaganda.

*Love on the Dole* was made in 1941, similar in tone to the many wartime films which had "realistic contemporary settings, ordinary people and emotional restraint."<sup>241</sup> It was directed by John Baxter, one of the first directors to concentrate on the conditions of the British working class, in films such as *The Common Touch* (1941) and *Let the People Sing* (1942) "which pleaded for a post-war society where the evils of the past – unemployment, poverty, class conflict, injustice – would be banished."<sup>242</sup> Whereas unemployment had previously been seen as a dangerous topic, this plea was allowed to be made in the guise

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<sup>240</sup> Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Best of British: Cinema and Society from 1930 to the Present* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 326.

<sup>241</sup> Aldgate and Richards, *Best of British*, 327.

<sup>242</sup> Robert Murphy, "Postscript: A Short History of British Cinema," in Murphy, *The British Cinema Book*, 312.

of wartime propaganda. With unemployment no longer an issue and with Britain fighting for its very existence, *Love on the Dole* could be seized on as a cry to reject the past and build a new future. In 1940, the *Times* wrote of the need for political, social, and economic equality, concluding that, “[t]he European house cannot be put in order unless we put our own house in order first. The new order cannot be based on the preservation of privilege, whether the privilege be that of a country, of a class, or of an individual.”<sup>243</sup> The new, refined message of *Love on the Dole* echoed the *Times*’s plea and was made clear at the beginning of the film:

This film recalls one of the darkest pages of our industrial history.

On the outskirts of every City, there is a region of darkness and poverty where men and women for ever strive to live decently in face of overwhelming odds never doubting that the clouds of depression will one day be lifted. Such a district was Hankey (*sic*) Park in March 1930.<sup>244</sup>

The film ends with Mrs Hardcastle wistfully, plaintively appealing to the camera that “people will begin to see what’s been happening, and once they do, there’ll not be no Hanky Park no more,” before a rousing epitaph by A. V. Alexander, Labour MP and First Lord of the Admiralty, is emblazoned on the screen:

Our working men and women have responded magnificently to any and every call made upon them. Their reward must be a new Britain. Never again must the unemployed become forgotten men of the peace.<sup>245</sup>

In terms of plot, the film differs slightly from the novel. Rather than focusing on the thoughts and problems of Harry Hardcastle, the film switches its attention to Sally. The film is far less self-conscious in its depiction of the romantic relationships and its style, rather than clumsily literary, is simple and straightforward. *Love on the Dole* the film is romantic, slightly sentimental, and does not strain beyond its self-imposed boundaries. The politics of the film are a natural part of the romantic plot and the propaganda is only made clear in the film’s prologue and epilogue.

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<sup>243</sup> Quoted in Angus Calder, *People’s War: The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 2002 [1969]), 137.

<sup>244</sup> John Baxter dir., *Love on the Dole* (Fabulous Films DVD, 2004 [1941]).

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

The film encounters complications in its use of dialect and accent, however. Sally Hardcastle is played by the Scottish Deborah Kerr, Larry Meath by the Welsh Clifford Evans, and Ned Narkey is played by Londoner Martin Walker, with an accent sometimes Cockney, sometimes vaguely Northern. Kerr attempts, fairly convincingly, to speak with a typical Lancashire accent. Evans sticks to his slight but distinct Welsh accent. This unfairly, and probably accidentally, accentuates Larry Meath's separateness from the community he wants to help and represent. The array of inaccurate accents undermines, but does not challenge, the authenticity of the film, unintentionally mirroring the way that Greenwood's emphasis on the Englishness of the Salford community had in the novel. The film's political and propagandist impact relies on the authenticity and truthfulness of its presentation of a working-class community, yet, because of the naïveté of an emerging British cinema, the film does not worry about being absolutely authentic.

However, the film is still successful despite its limitations and is an important landmark in British cinema. The partially successful attempts at regional accents in *Love on the Dole* are significant in their attempt to integrate the working class into mainstream British cinema. This ties in with the general propaganda feel of the film: that it is worth fighting to make the future of all the British people better, emphasizing a shared national identity at a time of war. *Love on the Dole* is representative of a new type of British film, which aimed, within the limitations of commercial cinema, to represent and describe the British people to the British people via a popular medium. This allowed British filmmaking to come of age, for "the war finally gave British films a distinctive subject to pursue, and a moral reason for doing so."<sup>246</sup> *Love on the Dole* was one of the first British films to present, and attempt to represent, the working class without condescension and contributed to the gradual reintegration of the working class into British life, part of the

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<sup>246</sup> Geoff Brown, "Paradise Found and Lost: The Course of British Realism," in Murphy, *The British Cinema Book*, 251.

process which led to the formation of the British welfare state and the election of Attlee's Labour government in 1945.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **THE CREATION OF A NEW WORKING-CLASS MYTHOLOGY IN ALAN SILLITOE'S *SATURDAY NIGHT AND SUNDAY MORNING***

In this chapter, I examine how at the end of the 1950s a group of novels with a working-class subject matter were published to great success and were adapted into popular films. Moving on from my discussion of how writers from a working-class background had struggled to describe, explain, and represent their community, I examine the manner in which working-class fiction developed a greater confidence and security at the end of the 1950s. I focus on Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) as a major example of a working-class novel which achieved commercial and literary success. I examine the literary examples and influences used by Sillitoe to help him write his first published novel; how the novel presents the class of its community; how its apparent authenticity plays a significant part in its success; how working-class affluence influenced culture and lifestyles; and how Sillitoe's portrayal of the working-class community is depoliticized.

I continue to trace the development of working-class life and literature in British culture. The publication of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* occurs at a defining point in the developing narrative of working-class culture. D. H. Lawrence wrote *Sons and Lovers* at a moment when interest in working-class life was increasing; Walter Greenwood wrote *Love on the Dole* at a moment when national identity had been scarred by the First World

War and economic crises, which created a heightened desire to improve the conditions of working-class life; Alan Sillitoe wrote *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* at a moment when national identity had been moulded by the shared experiences of the Second World War, which had integrated working-class culture into the British personality. This reintegration into British culture coincided with an economic affluence, resulting in an increased maturity in the representation of working-class life in fiction and cinema.

The new national identity eroded defining regional loyalties. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* documents the conflict between a national ethos of working-class respectability and collective decency and a regional ethos of working-class independence. The novel's aggressive self-confidence comes from the wartime identity and economic stability of the period, but it also comes from a desire to challenge that consensus. This challenge is acted out in a generational divide, between a prewar generation grateful for economic stability and a teenage generation determined to forge an independent identity immune to national loyalties. This is the political thrust of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*: to move away from stereotypes of working-class dependence, deprivation, and decency to define a new generation dominated by individual concerns. This individualism deliberately dissociates itself from collective representation, which makes *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* differ from the political motivations of *Love on the Dole* or *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. The anger and aggression of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*'s characters is depoliticized, detached from socialist ideologies. But it is an anger and aggression determined to create its own working-class identity.

The success of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* was not isolated. In this chapter I expand my focus by examining John Braine's *Room at the Top* (1957) and David Storey's *This Sporting Life* (1960) alongside *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. None of the three authors was motivated by the political ideal of representing his class. Instead, they were driven by an individual desire to write. But all three used their working-class communities



to explore similar themes of class, regional, and individual identity. I examine how the three novels develop and question these themes. In doing so, I demonstrate how the stereotype of a decent and dependent working class was adapted to create a new stereotype of an aggressive, independent, and youthful working class, which created the conditions for the prevailing working-class culture of the 1960s.

## I. Historical Contexts: “The tranquillized *Fifties*”<sup>247</sup>

### 1. British Literature

The period in which Alan Sillitoe was writing was different from both that of Lawrence and Greenwood. Political representation of the economically deprived working class had ceased to be an issue and the power of literary representation had lessened. The thrust behind 1930s working-class fiction was the desire for political and economic change. Loosely inspired by Marxist and socialist ideology, working-class fiction had desired to represent, re-enforce, and realign working-class culture; this was backed up by a similar desire in politically-orientated middle-class literature of the period. In the 1950s, however, a postwar political consensus had resulted in a decreased political motivation in British literature. This was seen in the writings of authors such as Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin, but there was also “a widespread view that in post-war Britain both working-class writing and political literature were obsolete.”<sup>248</sup> Most writers concerned themselves in their work with personal experience. Alan Sinfield frames it rather negatively: “At the end of a war that had shown the terrible consequences of fascist ideology, that had ended with the use of a weapon of unprecedented power, and that had produced a popular impetus towards social reform, one might have expected political involvement. But ... the instinct of literary intellectuals was to defend traditional ground.”<sup>249</sup> However, this political neutrality, or conservatism, reflected the common

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<sup>247</sup> Robert Lowell, “Memories of West Street and Lepke,” in *Life Studies* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001 [1959]), 93.

<sup>248</sup> Stuart Laing, *Representations of Working-Class Life 1957-1964* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1986), 59. Henceforth abbreviated RL.

<sup>249</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics, and Culture in Postwar Britain* (London: Athlone Books, 1997), 87.

“acceptance of British society as conflict-free” (RL, 59). The defeat of Nazism and the electoral success of the Labour Party had removed political and class conflict from British society and literature. British society, in its politics and the integration of working-class culture into its identity, was based for the first time since the nineteenth century on consensus and stability. Although in this chapter I incorporate this view into my reading of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, I also counter the acceptance of this consensus, for postwar British identity was marked by tension and insecurity which belie the notion of a stable consensus. Furthermore, focusing on the working-class novels written through and published at the end of the 1950s demonstrates the complicated levels of acceptance of and resistance to consensus politics: support for Labour is strong, the level of both physical and verbal violence is high, ambition to move into different social circles is apparent. These novels also imply that class consciousness had decreased, for the novels’ working-class characters are not engaged in a class war or strongly involved in the labour or union movement. However, class association was still strongly felt, for class remains in the novels a key means of defining one’s character – although community, region, and workplace are tied into the notion of both identity and class. Thus, the working-class fiction published towards the end of the decade implicitly rejected both the mainstream political consensus and extreme left-wing politics by placing a depoliticized aggression at the centre of (male) working-class identity.

Unlike the 1930s, there was little cultural involvement by either of the main political parties. Neither postwar government provided any significant amount of cultural funding, nor did they see culture or literature as a means of disseminating political ideas. Furthermore, the political atmosphere of the 1950s had so changed from the 1930s that any political commitment was viewed with suspicion as uncommercial. With fascism a defeated cause, communism was the new enemy. Stuart Laing mentions Jack Lindsay and Len Doherty as communist writers who received little commercial or critical attention

(*RL*, 61). Andy Croft also lists several writers whose support for communism had not harmed them before and during the war, but did harm them after it.<sup>250</sup>

Literature was instead concerned with individual experience. In 1954, the *Spectator* discovered the “Movement,” a loose grouping of new writers it described as “anti-wet; sceptical, robust, ironic ... .”<sup>251</sup> Although more varied in style and concerns than the *Spectator* gave them credit for, the Movement rejected modernist ideals, favouring an emphasis on personal, everyday experience over political and cultural commitment. Again, Sinfield views this negatively, feeling that the personal impulse of such writing was too superficial and unquestioning:

Even Englishness and historical sequence, which Leavis and T. S. Eliot had discovered in their tradition, disappear from view. ... intellectuals are confined to ‘objects’ falling narrowly within their expertise; those objects seem to dispose themselves naturally; no raising of the eyes from the page to the wider world is required; values, other than ‘literary values’, are not at issue.<sup>252</sup>

D. J. Taylor voices the other side to the argument: “More so than the decades which had preceded them, the 1950s were a time when novels were thought accurately to reflect the social microcosm,” to the point that novels were given the status of a documentary.<sup>253</sup>

This was particularly true of the large group of novels by working-class writers published at the end of the decade, for “in a world that tends to be re-created by anecdote and folk memory ... the [working-class] novel takes on, more than perhaps is customary, the status of a historical artefact.”<sup>254</sup>

Towards the end of the 1950s a generation of working-class writers emerged, addressing in a similarly aggressive manner new working-class concerns: social mobility, individualism, sexuality, leisure, and work. These novels were written through the 1950s, reflecting social concerns and developing material wealth, published at similar points at

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<sup>250</sup> Andy Croft, “Betrayed Spring: The Labour Government and the British Literary Culture,” in *Labour’s Promised Land? Culture and Society in Labour Britain, 1945-51*, ed. Jim Fyrrh (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), 216.

<sup>251</sup> Andrew Motion, *Philip Larkin: A Writer’s Life* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993), 242.

<sup>252</sup> Sinfield, *Literature, Politics, and Culture*, 105.

<sup>253</sup> D. J. Taylor, *After the War: The Novel and English Society since 1945* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 66.

<sup>254</sup> Taylor, *After the War*, 106.

the end of the decade (see *RL*, 63). It is not just the similar nature of these works which is of note, but also the success which the novels enjoyed.<sup>255</sup> Reaching a wide audience, they both reflected and promoted a new working-class sensibility. The novels were all made into successful films, which helped lead to the working-class cultural emergence of the 1960s.

This generation of working-class writers was more connected to the literary establishment than writers of the 1930s had been. Sharing an indifference to modernism, a disrespect towards the political establishment, and the financial imperative to earn money, working-class fiction was integrated into the critically and commercially successful literature of the 1950s. As Stuart Laing states, the nature of the working-class literature published at the end of the 1950s had been handed down “by a particular post-war genre, that of the young male hero on the make in the fluid social situation of a new Britain” (*RL*, 61). He draws a direct line from Larkin to Wain and Amis, to Osborne, to Braine, and then Sillitoe. Sillitoe is not only part of this 1950s generation, he inherits the tradition of working-class writing established by Lawrence. This places him alongside literary and cultural intellectuals such as Leavis, Williams, and Hoggart, who, as I mentioned in the introduction, held Lawrence up as an important and influential figure. Using Lawrence as a means of talking about national and personal identity, class, and literature, these figures demonstrate the significance of Lawrence to 1950s writers. The influence of Lawrence on Sillitoe was also clear: following the form of focusing on the young adult using place, class, and sexuality to work out his identity (see p.188).

Another significant aspect of 1950s writing which Sillitoe shared with writers such as John Wain and Kingsley Amis is the emphasis on regional identity and location. In

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<sup>255</sup> “Hardcover sales” of *Room at the Top* “amounted to 34,000, there was serialization in the Daily Express and a book club edition sold 125,000.” Arthur Marwick, “*Room at the Top*, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, and the ‘Cultural Revolution’ in Britain,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 19:1 (January 1984), 131. The paperback edition of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* was reprinted thirteen times within four years of its first printing (*RL*, 65).

*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, region is also associated with class, part of the tradition Sillitoe was inheriting from Lawrence and Greenwood. This move away from the metropolitan focus of modernism is a result of the cultural activities of the Second World War. Andy Croft states that during the war there had been a spreading out of literature and culture away from the capital to other cities and describes in detail the effects of this cultural dissemination.<sup>256</sup> Although he feels this dissemination finished with the war, much of the literature of the 1950s was set firmly away from London – for example, John Wain’s *Hurry on Down!*, Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim* (both 1953), and William Cooper’s *Scenes from Provincial Life* (1950). The latter novel predates the theme of loose sexual morals in smalltown England, against the backdrop of postwar ennui, that figures prominently in *Room at the Top*. These works are defiantly yet uneasily non-metropolitan, with London a loud absence – in *Scenes from Provincial Life*, Oxford replaces London as the city that the provincial would-be intellectuals look towards as a cultural centre. Provincialism was defined in 1955 by S. W. Dawson as living away from a cultural centre but within a “traditional and stable” and “intellectually cramping” society. For him, Eliot, Hardy, and Lawrence were the three great provincial novelists, but he doubted that “any English novelist after Lawrence will turn his provincialism so triumphantly to account”; “if a provincial tradition did exist, it exists no longer.”<sup>257</sup> I do not see Sillitoe, Storey, or Braine was writing within a provincial tradition, as there is an interesting distinction between their provincialism and their working-class backgrounds. With a non-metropolitan tradition of working-class literature on which to draw, in these first novels of Sillitoe, Storey, and Braine, the regional location is integral to the themes of the novels, with London absent.

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<sup>256</sup> Croft, “Betrayed Spring,” in Fyrth, *Labour’s Promised Land?*, 201.

<sup>257</sup> S. W. Dawson, “‘Provincial’ – A Modern Critical Term,” in *Essays in Criticism* 5:3 (July 1955), 279 and 280.

Despite the supposed absence of class conflict in 1950s British society, class was still an integral factor in 1950s literature and film. The Ealing comedies play on stereotypes of class, class resentment is central to the character of Jim Dixon in *Lucky Jim*, and the incoherent class resentment of John Osborne's Jimmy Porter is the character's driving force. The confused class rebellion of *Look Back in Anger* is removed from 1930s socialist rhetoric, but it indicates the terms of class arguments at the time. Similarly, the plots of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, *This Sporting Life*, and *Room at the Top* are fought in terms of sex as much as class. It is this class incoherence, removed from socialist ideology and uneasily oppositional towards received political consensus, which I study in this chapter. This confusion rises from greater educational opportunities, the forged consensus of the Second World War, and, particularly in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *This Sporting Life*, an emergent youth culture. In this chapter, I give an overview of the developments in British culture from the Second World War onwards in order to demonstrate how these developments are incorporated into the working-class fiction at the end of the decade. I show that working-class literature, like its culture, had been incorporated into a national identity, resulting in a commercially successful narrative. But I also demonstrate that the working-class mythology created by the Second World War is rejected in favour of a new, more aggressive mythology.

## 2. From "The People's War" to the Affluent Fifties

As the epigraph to the film version of *Love on the Dole* made clear, the Second World War changed attitudes to the working class, connecting the economic suffering of the early 1930s to the economic affluence and cultural confidence of the late 1950s. Angus Calder relates that the term "the people's war" was created in 1940 by the founder of the

Home Guard, Tom Wintringham.<sup>258</sup> The term resonated because, according to a pervasive belief, the nation had to come together irrespective of class in order to win the war. The war signalled the paramount need for unity and this unity could not be exclusive. Social and economic inequality were to belong to the past. The war years saw the political establishment investigate how to implement social change, to ensure that there was “equality and opportunity” for all.<sup>259</sup> The Beveridge Report of 1942 led to the founding in 1948 of the National Health Service, which for the first time was to provide free healthcare for all and social security providing universal unemployment benefits, “appear[ing] to provide what the poor had long wanted – freedom from fear of poverty as of right without a means test.”<sup>260</sup> Both the Conservative and Labour Parties saw the vital need for full employment after the consistently high unemployment of the interwar years. This desire was not solely provoked by the need to alleviate working-class poverty, but also by Beveridge’s desire to “attack ... the five giants of Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and,” most importantly, “Idleness,” which Greenwood had seen haunting the unemployed men in *Love on the Dole*.<sup>261</sup> This liberal, paternalist, rather than socialist, state interventionism helped create more than twenty-five years of low unemployment, which did not rise above 2.5% until 1971.<sup>262</sup> Those who were too ill (like Arthur Seaton’s brother in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*) or too old to work would no longer be a financial hindrance on their family, but would receive benefits or pensions to support them. Poverty did not disappear but, in general, living standards were greatly increased by these reforms.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Calder, *People’s War*, 138.

<sup>259</sup> Michael Sanderson, “Education and Social Mobility,” in Johnson, *Twentieth-Century Britain*, 374.

<sup>260</sup> Rodney Lowe, “Postwar Welfare,” in Johnson, *Twentieth-Century Britain*, 358.

<sup>261</sup> Lowe, “Postwar Welfare,” in Johnson, *Twentieth-Century Britain*, 358.

<sup>262</sup> Peter Howlett, “The ‘Golden Age’, 1955-1973,” in Johnson, *Twentieth-Century Britain*, 325.

<sup>263</sup> It has been estimated that four million people were still living in poverty in 1953 and seven and a half million in 1960 (Lowe, “Postwar Welfare,” in Johnson, *Twentieth-Century Britain*, 363; see also Sinfield, *Literature, Politics, and Culture*, 21).



It is important to remember, however, that this process was gradual and complex. Support of the CPGB reached an all-time high during the Second World War, significantly higher than in the contested environment of the 1930s, although this peaked after Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.<sup>264</sup> When Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were still linked by the Nazi-Soviet Pact of non-aggression, the activities of the CPGB were seen as dangerous and disruptive by the wartime government. The slogans of the CPGB echoed the sentiments of mainstream politicians, as they called for a "People's Government," a "people's peace," and arranged a well-attended "People's Convention" held in January 1941, which led to the suppression of the *Daily Worker* nine days later for eighteen months.<sup>265</sup> This government concern over communist influence, matched by the BBC's attempted censorship of communist sympathizers, demonstrates the fragility of wartime unity and political consensus. Calder also relates accusations of company profiteering and the presence of a black market, as well as the continued high number of strikes held against the backdrop of the unemployment of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>266</sup> Government and capital were held in distrust, and it was up to the Government to allay those fears.

The 1944 Education Act aimed to bring education to all of the population. The leaving age was raised to fifteen and students were given the opportunity to attend grammar, technical, or secondary modern schools to match each student's needs.<sup>267</sup> In effect, however, the changes brought in were not radical enough. Instead, they "perpetuated an Edwardian system of schooling and retained some of its social class assumptions."<sup>268</sup> The opportunity to develop a technical education system was lost,

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<sup>264</sup> See footnote 191.

<sup>265</sup> See Calder, *The People's War*, 244-47.

<sup>266</sup> See Calder, *The People's War*, 254 and 259. A popular and comic example of the black market is the character of Private Walker in *Dad's Army*.

<sup>267</sup> The Act resulted in 20% of sixteen- to eighteen-year-olds remaining in education in 1961, compared to just 6% thirty years previously (RL, 25).

<sup>268</sup> Sanderson, "Education and Social Mobility," in Johnson, *Twentieth-Century Britain*, 374.

meaning that pupils were divided into those intelligent enough to attend a grammar school and those not, a division in many ways predicated by class.<sup>269</sup>

As early as 1942, politicians and activists were privately preparing for a postwar election. The difference from previous elections was that popular and political opinion were with Labour, the war seeing a wide acceptance of the need for social reform and public ownership.<sup>270</sup> The Conservatives suffered a series of by-election defeats, which, although not at the hands of Labour, anticipated Labour's victory in the 1945 election, by a majority of 146 seats. This did not mean a radical swing to socialism, however. Labour's six years of government saw great social reform, but the seeds of this overdue reform had been planted during the war. They also saw increased state intervention and nationalization, but, with the crippling debt that war had left, these measures were seen as necessary by both major political parties in order to ensure that the boom and subsequent bust which had followed the First World War was not repeated. On Labour's victory, the Manchester based *Labour's Northern Voice* declared, "The *revolution* without a single cracked skull. The pioneers' dream realized at long last. Nothing to stand in the way of laying the *socialist* foundation of the new social order."<sup>271</sup> Attlee announced in 1946, however, that, "The Government has gone as far left as is consistent with sound reason and the national interest."<sup>272</sup> Although the Labour Party had scored a remarkable victory, it was not a triumph for left-wing socialism, but for left-of-centre politics. Calder describes the Conservative Party as being in disarray in these changing times, but younger Tories such as Harold Macmillan and R. A. B. Butler, who came to dominate the

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<sup>269</sup> Another important consequence of the war was the expansion of the Adult Education Corps and the establishment of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs, two organizations which played a great part in educating soldiers politically (see Calder, *People's War*, 251 and Croft, "Betrayed Spring," in Fyrth, *Labour's Promised Land?*, 202).

<sup>270</sup> See Calder, *People's War*, 575.

<sup>271</sup> Quoted in Calder, *People's War*, 583.

<sup>272</sup> C. J. Bartlett, *A History of Postwar Britain 1945-1974* (London: Longman, 1977), 47.

Party in the 1950s, saw that they had to go along with the flow of the times in order to influence wartime and postwar politics.

The election of the Conservatives in 1951 did not result in any great change on domestic policy, with an important consensus on health and welfare by both Labour and the Conservatives. However, it is important to recognize the differences between the two major parties at both the 1950 and 1951 elections. In both elections, the Liberals, who won nine and six seats at the elections, accused the parties of engaging in a class war, indicating the level of consensus was not secure. Labour wished to continue nationalization, including sugar, cement, and steel; the Conservatives opposed this policy. 1950s politics was a two-party divide; although the Conservatives won the 1951 election, they did so with 200,000 votes less than Labour, who recorded their highest ever vote. Thus the 1950s were the decade of Butskellism and consensus, but there were clear differences between the parties, arguably based more on class than before the war.<sup>273</sup>

Nottingham in the 1940s and 1950s forms part of this national political framework. The city's constituencies were not solidly safe Labour seats and the 1950s saw shifts away from Labour to the Conservatives, particularly at the time of the writing and publication of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. In 1945, all the Nottingham seats fell to Labour, Nottingham East for the first time, remaining so until its abolition in 1955. Nottingham Central was also won by Labour for the first time in 1945, although the Conservatives won it back in 1955. Nottingham West, which had been a Labour seat from 1918 to 1931, remained Labour from 1935 to 1959 (except for between 1950 and 1955 when the seat was temporarily abolished), but was lost to the Conservatives in 1959 until it was regained at the 1964 election. Nottingham North was established as a constituency in 1955 and has voted Labour thereafter, except in 1983. Nottingham South voted Labour

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<sup>273</sup> See [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/vote2001/in\\_depth/election\\_battles/1950\\_issues.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/vote2001/in_depth/election_battles/1950_issues.stm) and [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/vote2001/in\\_depth/election\\_battles/1951\\_issues.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/vote2001/in_depth/election_battles/1951_issues.stm). Accessed 23 June, 2008.

in 1929, but in the 1930s went over to National Labour, which supported the Conservative government. In 1945, the constituency returned a Labour Co-operative member, but voted Conservative in 1955, until 1966.<sup>274</sup> Nottingham South covered working-class areas such as Clifton and Radford, the area in which *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is set and where the Raleigh factory was located. Although the area in which Arthur Seaton lives is described as Labour through and through, the success of the Conservatives at both the 1955 and 1959 elections indicates how fragile Labour support was even in urban working-class areas in the 1950s. The shifts in the political representation of Nottingham indicate a political landscape that was not entirely stable, but which saw a clear opposition between Labour and the Conservatives, with successes for both sides. This can be seen to demonstrate the narrow centre ground political spectrum or, conversely, the highly contested and unpredictable nature of 1950s politics.

As the 1950s progressed, austerity gradually gave way to affluence so that by the publication of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Macmillan was able to declare that “most of our people have never had it so good” (July 1957) – an opinion already declared by the *Daily Express* two years previously (RL, 11).<sup>275</sup> This affluence can be misleading, seeming far greater due to the poverty of the 1930s and the deprivation of the 1940s; economic growth, while large, suffered in comparison with Germany, Italy, and Japan, countries defeated in the war, and the USA and France. In terms of wage structure and reliance on overtime and bonuses, “the relative situation at the end of the 1950s was not substantially different from that at the beginning of the 1930s” (RL, 24).<sup>276</sup> British people in the 1950s may have never had it so good, but they still did not have it as good as their

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<sup>274</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Parliamentary\\_constituencies\\_in\\_Nottinghamshire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Parliamentary_constituencies_in_Nottinghamshire). For Nottingham West, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nottingham\\_West\\_%28UK\\_Parliament\\_constituency%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nottingham_West_%28UK_Parliament_constituency%29). Accessed 14 July, 2008.

<sup>275</sup> Macmillan quoted by Catherine R. Schenk, “Austerity and Boom,” in Johnson, *Twentieth-Century Britain*, 316.

<sup>276</sup> Wages grew from £6/8 a week in 1950 to £11/2/6 in 1959, an actual increase from £125 to £142 at 1997 prices. See Peter Lewis, *The Fifties: Portrait of a Period* (London: The Herbert Press, 1989), 32.

neighbours and competitors. Furthermore, despite the *Daily Express's* and Macmillan's declarations of unprecedented well-being, there was a mounting confusion regarding national identity. Although the Second World War had forged a new national consensus, the economic superiority in the 1950s of the countries they had defeated led to a self-questioning. Britain's Empire was disappearing and the country's powerful global position had been superseded by the USA. The class system was in a state of uneasy flux and immigration increased rapidly, adding to the uncertainty of identity.

The economic affluence which Britain was enjoying is central to an understanding of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. It accounts for the confident individualism, the consumerist lifestyles, and the political indifference of the working-class characters which the novel portrays. It also accounts for the centrality of teenage culture in the novel. The affluence enables Sillitoe to move away from the portraits of the 1930s and also from the mythology of consensus which dominated perceptions of the working class in the 1950s.

### 3. Teenage Culture

Arthur Seaton in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is around 21. Although slightly too old to be classed as a teenager, his lifestyle, revolving around purchasing products to project an image of affluence and confidence, is an indication of teenage culture in 1950s Britain. Seaton is a member of a postwar generation, but also Britain's "first post-imperial generation."<sup>277</sup> This accounts for Seaton's aggressive self-distancing from authority and from the past.

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<sup>277</sup> Liz Heron quoted in Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States* (London: Penguin Books, 1999 [1997]), 296.

The 1950s saw an increased spending power for teenagers, in common with their parents. Peter Lewis sums up this new found affluence and spending power: “In Britain five million teenagers, four million of them at work at an average of £8 a week, were spending £830 million by 1959, on clothes, cigarettes, records and cosmetics, in that order.”<sup>278</sup> Lewis associates this with an increased American-influenced consumerism, with large companies targeting and exploiting the teenage market.

Lewis also differentiates the new 1950s teenager by focusing on their desire for violent rebellion: “Crimes by offenders under the age of twenty-one in England rose from 24,000 in 1955 to 45,000 in 1959.”<sup>279</sup> Crime and youthful rebellion were most associated with the Teddy Boys, “a not very numerous but very colourful minority of unskilled, unregarded urban working-class boys who sought an identity through draped jackets, velvet collars and drainpipe trousers.” This rebellious look was further exaggerated by “long, greasy, curly and sideboarded” hair, a look not confined to the Teddy Boy but to the independent youth.<sup>280</sup> This violent element, however, was only a small section of youth culture; rather, it was an extreme example of “establishing an identity. This identity was organized around a notion of youth, which in turn described itself through ‘freedom’.”<sup>281</sup> This desire for freedom, or independence, was demonstrated through teenagers’ emphasis on fashion: how they looked was as important as what they said or did, marking a change from the uniform look of prewar youth. Although fashion had been important then for young men – witness Harry Hardcastle’s determination to buy Sunday clothes at the beginning of *Love on the Dole* – the 1950s saw the defiant fashion statement symbolizing a break from their elders.

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<sup>278</sup> Lewis, *The Fifties*, 141-42.

<sup>279</sup> Lewis, *The Fifties*, 118. Compared to a figure of nearly 29,000 in 1937 and just over 60,000 in 1967 (in A. H. Halsey ed., *Twentieth-Century British Trends* [London: Macmillan, 2000 (1988)], 692-93). Lewis perhaps overstates the violent nature of the new teenager – juvenile crime increased sharply during the war also (Calder, *People’s War*, 225). The figures are complicated further by the fact that the number of teenagers increased greatly after the Second World War, from over three million in 1951 to over four million in 1965 (John Street, “Youth Culture,” in Johnson, *Twentieth-Century Britain*, 463).

<sup>280</sup> Lewis, *The Fifties*, 118 and 120.

<sup>281</sup> Street, “Youth Culture,” in Johnson, *Twentieth-Century Britain*, 464.

This fashion-consciousness was part of an increased teenage consumerism, which John Street sees as the tangible symbol of a new independence, “the freedom of not being responsible (of not being your parents), but also ... the freedom to consume.” Like Lewis, Street acknowledges the importance of US culture in promoting this consumerism, but is aware that fashion and popular music were also “the product of distinctive local traditions, most notably those of the music hall and British light entertainment.”<sup>282</sup> Teenage culture was, though, more of a national creation than it had been before the Second World War. Teenagers were united, through radio, television, and cinema, by similar fashions, styles, concerns, and purchases and local youth culture was submerged into a national culture instead. The most important element was to be different from one’s parents. In the 1930s, it was the fear of ending up like them that made teenagers wish for a different future; in the 1950s, economic independence allowed teenagers simply to want, and to be able, to be different from their parents.

It was not only youth leisure expenditure which increased, but family spending on luxury goods, such as television sets and cars, which Laing terms “the imagery of affluence” (RL, 28). This rise in the quality of living – as long as one equates the number of household goods with living standards – was seen at the time, and by subsequent historians/sociologists, as leading to a depoliticizing “embourgeoisement” of the working class. Television, in particular its output, and other luxury goods nullified working-class political sentiment; increased housing standards, in tandem with a move from the working-class city centre slums to the middle-class suburbs, led to the working classes taking on middle-class standards and values (RL, 17).

The “depoliticization” argument is persuasive, given the consensus in party politics at the time and the decreasing electoral turnouts; though increased quality of news and current affairs programmes (e.g. *Panorama*) and the narrowing of the divide between

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

parliamentary politicians, party activists, and voters belie the argument. This argument provides too neat a view of the contrast between interwar political activism and conflict and postwar consensus, when in actual fact Labour's share of the vote was higher in the 1950s than in the interwar period. Teenage consumerism was dominated by working-class tastes; although one can view working-class teenagers as being manipulated by large American companies, their taste in film, music, and clothes still had to be catered for. Finally, class "confusion," if not class "conflict," continued. Class mobility was at a high, but did not mean an end to class barriers, nor to the highly-strung self-analysis of which barrier one was on the side of: "Heritage? Attitude? Money? Education? Professional standing? Nobody seemed sure which of these elements contributed, and in what proportion, to one's class status."<sup>283</sup> Class was still at the centre of a person's, a family's, and a community's identity. In *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Arthur Seaton rebels against this forced embourgeoisement by aggressively forging a confused class identity. He attempts to reassert regional and individual identity over a national construct.

#### 4. Women in the 1950s

The role of women in the 1950s was ambiguous. The war had led to far greater emancipation for women and going out to work was no longer a source of shame. There were sexually liberated role models – Brigitte Bardot, Marilyn Monroe, Diana Dors – but these were troubled exceptions. No woman could display or express her sexuality as brazenly as (the French) Bardot; the comforting domesticity of Doris Day was expected instead. A married woman's duty was still primarily to her family and the 1950s woman was not fully liberated from her household duties, albeit the burden was made lighter by household goods such as the washing machine and the fridge.

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<sup>283</sup> Taylor, *After the War*, 66.



Elizabeth Wilson states that “women’s traditional role as a stabilizing and civilizing force – the ideology of the Victorians – was made a lynchpin of consensus now that women too were citizens.”<sup>284</sup> The war, similarly to the First World War, had shown that women could carry out men’s jobs just as efficiently and effectively and a woman’s right to work was questioned far less than before. In 1931, 10% of married women worked, compared to 32% by 1961, although many of the jobs were part-time.<sup>285</sup> Pay, too, was a problem: women received just 53% of a man’s salary in 1952 and, due to the part-time and temporary nature of their work, did not receive union and pension benefits which men were entitled to.<sup>286</sup>

The idea of the working wife conflicted with her maternal role, which was seen as integral to the stability of the family (and therefore of the country). 32% of married women working was a significant advance, but it indicates that marriage largely meant an end to a working career. That going out to work resulted in neglecting the children (and the husband) was a common belief: “Monica Dickens ... warned career women ... in 1956 that they could be endangering the love of their children. She portrayed shallow ambition on one side and the deeper virtues of homely intimacy on the other.”<sup>287</sup> Although the pleasure and importance of work was stressed by others, Dickens’s opinion became more widespread as the decade went on, and the role of women was viewed more conservatively.

Domestic appliances transformed the housewife’s tasks. Sales of fridges, for example, rose from £384,000 in 1949 to £779,000 in 1957.<sup>288</sup> The introduction of such appliances can be seen as making a housewife’s role easier, giving her more time for leisure or paid

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<sup>284</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain 1945-1968* (London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1980), 3.

<sup>285</sup> Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise*, 41. Women formed 26% of the part-time workforce in 1961 (Pat Thane, “Women since 1945,” in Johnson, *Twentieth-Century Britain*, 393).

<sup>286</sup> Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise*, 51.

<sup>287</sup> Rowbotham, *A Century of Women*, 292.

<sup>288</sup> Schenk, “Austerity and Boom,” in Johnson, *Twentieth-Century Britain*, 316.

work. Wilson contests this “widely accepted myth”: “Somehow the installation of hoovers, refrigerators, electric mixers, and washing machines was held to give women *equality*”; it was no more than “an equalization of drudgery ... misunderstood as emancipation.”<sup>289</sup> Nor did such devices lessen a woman’s domestic workload. A working-class woman spent an average of 500 minutes a day on housework in 1950; by 1961, it had fallen by just an hour to 440 minutes. Furthermore, a middle-class woman’s daily workload increased from 235 minutes in 1937 to 440, the same as a working-class woman’s, in 1961.<sup>290</sup> This is due, in part, to a fall in domestic labour. But domestic chores – cooking, cleaning, child-raising – fell almost solely on women. The 1950s can be described as a decade of carefully constrained female emancipation. These constraints appear in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, conflicting with the male-orientated working-class identity forged at the workplace. The conflicting imperatives of marriage, work, and leisure shape both male and female working-class identity.

The first work of note by a female working-class author was Shelagh Delaney’s play *A Taste of Honey* (1958). Although women writers found critical and commercial success in popular and literary fiction, working-class fiction was confined to male writers. This mirrors the sidelining of the female workforce in labour politics. The female working class did not receive the economic, linguistic, and political emancipation enjoyed by the male working class. All novels studied in this thesis are by men, concentrating on the intellectual development of working-class men and focusing on a male working-class culture. This results in an inevitably imbalanced presentation of the female working class. Their sexuality is seen through the viewpoint of the male characters, making the portraits highly sexualized. As with other aspects of working-class life, the authors attempt to give a realist presentation of the female working class. But they cannot avoid punishing the female characters for the sins of the male characters; it is only in *A Taste of Honey* that

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<sup>289</sup> Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise*, 12-13.

<sup>290</sup> Thane, “Women since 1945,” in Johnson, *Twentieth-Century Britain*, 401.

working-class femininity is asserted with the same confident self-analysis that is seen in the presentation of Arthur Seaton in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*.<sup>291</sup>

## 5. The End of Empire

The cold war generated a feeling of conspiracy and paranoia, at a time when the British Empire was collapsing despite desperate efforts to keep it upright. The postwar Labour government oversaw many substantial changes to the country's social structure, especially in the welfare state, but foreign policy saw an actual increase in military investment and activity. Antagonism to communism and the Soviet Union was as high as the USA could have wished. Despite a financial, military, and political dependency on the USA, Labour, followed by the Conservatives, wished to maintain Britain's position as a global power. Britain's withdraw from its colonies was gradual; although Britain withdrew from India, Burma, and Ceylon in 1947, it did not grant independence to Ghana until 1957, Kenya in 1960, and the newly-formed Malaysia in 1963. Rather than cutting back on military spending in order to finance the restructuring of the welfare state and British industry, the development of the atomic bomb was pursued at high cost and National Service was introduced in order to keep numbers in the army at an appropriately high level, taking skilled young men away from industry.<sup>292</sup> The Korean war, the first postwar conflict designed to halt the spread of communism, meant that defence spending could be not cut back to accommodate domestic spending; in 1951 the defence expenditure for the next three years was planned to double to £4,700 million.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> See John Kirk, "Figuring the Landscape: Writing the Topographies of Community and Place," in *Literature and History* 15:1 (Spring 2006), 1-17, for a discussion of the importance of this male-centred analysis of working-class community in twentieth-century working-class fiction.

<sup>292</sup> In 1946, 500,000 servicemen were still overseas at the cost of half of the balance of payments deficit, when labour shortage was estimated at the same figure. See Bartlett, *A History of Postwar Britain*, 32.

<sup>293</sup> Bartlett, *A History of Postwar Britain*, 87.

Several other wars were being fought through the 1950s, provoked by nationalist anti-colonialism. British and other Commonwealth troops were involved in the Malayan guerrilla war, twelve years of jungle warfare provoked by Chinese communists, and insurgencies were contained with force in Kenya and Cyprus. Britain's presence in the Middle East was also problematic and the desire to retain a position of influence in the area led to the Suez crisis in 1956. The failure of military intervention exposed Britain's lack of military and political power and its dependency on the USA, who chose not to support the move.

The gradual collapse of the British Empire affected the country's economy and changed how its citizens perceived themselves. The nature of Britain's relationship with its colonies also changed. Britain's withdrawal from India and Pakistan saw many Indians and Pakistanis follow British officials to the UK, a process repeated in most former colonies, most particularly in the Caribbean. The end of the Second World War led to a huge migratory resettling, and, in particular, many Poles and Italians moved to, and established themselves in, Britain, as did German POWs who remained in the country. Irish immigration, which had dominated the nineteenth century, continued in great number.

It was the Caribbean immigrants (along with, to a lesser extent, Asians) who aroused the most controversy. The arrival of the *Empire Windrush* into London in 1948, carrying 492 passengers from the Caribbean, created a storm of controversy which did not die down until the Government imposed limits on immigration in the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act. Levels of immigration increased throughout the 1950s until there were 210,000 Commonwealth immigrants living in Britain in 1958, 115,000 of whom were West Indian.<sup>294</sup> With such huge numbers having left the country and so many men still

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<sup>294</sup> Robert Winder, *Bloody Foreigners: The Story of Immigration to Britain* (London: Abacus, 2004), 362. The high levels of immigration contrasted with prewar emigration, which from 1901 to 1931 totalled 2,410,000 (see Halsey, *Twentieth-Century British Social Trends*, 129).

serving overseas, there was an acute labour shortage, which Commonwealth immigrants could fill. But both Labour and Conservative governments were wary of, and discouraged, immigration from the colonies, without ever specifying their qualms. Privately, the colonial secretary expressed his belief and relief that “every possible step has been taken ... to discourage these influxes”; Attlee was also confident that “influxes” could be avoided, although he tried to be more encouraging: “The majority of them are honest workers and can, I feel, make a genuine contribution to our labour difficulties at the present time.”<sup>295</sup>

Reactions to Caribbean immigrants varied from warm welcomes to the deeply hostile. It was in 1958 that press hysteria and local antagonism escalated into violence, largely involving Teddy Boys who were looking for trouble in any form. In Nottingham, where 3,000 Caribbeans lived, attacks became so frequent and dangerous that they stopped going out at night. In August, “a black man was seen talking to a white woman. ... a thousand whites took to the streets ‘to express their anger’.”<sup>296</sup> At the same time the West Indian population responded to violent Teddy Boy confrontation and attacks in Notting Hill with petrol bombs of their own.

The uneasy response to the immigration of the 1950s reveals a nation unsure of its new position in the postwar, cold war world. The Empire had gone, along with its associated power and prestige, yet the subjects of the Empire were coming to Britain, looking for jobs, money, and security. People were unsure how to deal with these new neighbours, fellow British citizens yet a different colour from thousands of miles away. In a decade where national and local identities were being transformed and confused by Americanization and class mobility, this was a further unsettling confusion that some were unable to handle.

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<sup>295</sup> Quoted in Ian R. G. Spencer, *British Immigration Policy since 1939: The Making of Multi-Racial Britain* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 52.

<sup>296</sup> Winder, *Bloody Foreigners*, 363-64.

The Korean and cold wars, the Suez crisis, race riots, compulsory National Service: the tone of the decade was bellicosely bleak, as reflected in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. In *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, National Service plays a central role in establishing the novel's military tone and symbolizing the split between regional and national identity and between individualism and authority. National Service was established by the Labour government in order to maintain sufficient postwar peacetime armed forces. Forced conscription for eighteen-year-olds came into effect in 1949, having been introduced in the National Service Act of July 1947, with recruits required to serve for eighteen months; with the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, this was raised to two years. Many soldiers (most National Servicemen went into the army) served overseas, often in the Far East or Germany. This allowed young soldiers an opportunity to live far from home and experience exotic cultures, as well as to broaden their social horizons. One recruit recalls that "by the time of call-up I had met few people not from Swindon ... or from other social classes ... . So, to be surrounded by so many different or new accents, expressions ... was an ear-opener. Then, to meet ex-Borstal Boys, Public Schoolboys, Graduates, Illiterates, etc. was an even greater experience."<sup>297</sup>

The regime was often harshly disciplinarian, with a great deal of bullying and humiliation inflicted on the recruits. Recruits recalled "tyrannical NCOs, all the time terrorising, menacing and bullying ... . / We lived with fear every moment of our waking lives," although this shared suffering did lead to a solidarity between the soldiers.<sup>298</sup> This disciplinarianism was intended to form units of fighting men, but it instead led to a set of identical, indistinguishable soldiers – "We ceased to be individuals the moment our feet touched the platform [on arrival]."<sup>299</sup> Furthermore, the uniform regimentary nature and army disorganization meant that "the Army did not exploit skills and experience gained

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<sup>297</sup> Trevor Royle, *The Best Years of Their Lives: The National Service Experience 1945-1963* (London: John Murray (Publishers), 1997 [1986]), 37.

<sup>298</sup> In Royle, *The National Service Experience*, 39-40.

<sup>299</sup> In Royle, *The National Service Experience*, 38.

as a civilian,” resulting “among the more independent young soldiers” in “a contempt for the army.”<sup>300</sup>

National Service was also seen as “socially disruptive,” taking young men away from their natural environment for a futile two years abroad, especially for working-class youths who left school at fifteen and then went into National Service after a gap of three years, thus preventing them from establishing a career.<sup>301</sup> National Service nevertheless had popular support throughout the 1950s until the Government decided to abandon it in 1957.<sup>302</sup> There is no doubt that National Service was a formative experience in young men’s lives in the 1950s, establishing many of their social attitudes, especially to authority. Bill Williamson cites it as “reinforc[ing] many aspects of the social divisions of British society,” particularly class divisions: public-school educated officers commanding state-school soldiers in a highly-disciplined, regimented, ordered environment. Thus, “national service ... was an experience which in manifold ways ritually confirmed structures of authority and hierarchy,” although for some, if not many, young soldiers such a brutal social ordering made them distance and detach themselves from such established hierarchies.<sup>303</sup>

It also accounts for the militaristic imagination running through the working-class literature of the time. The Second World War was still a vivid memory, though more for adults than teenagers and the violence and loss of the conflict played a great part in

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<sup>300</sup> “The History of the British Army: National Service and the post-1945 British Army,” <http://www.national-army-museum.ac.uk/pages/nat-service.html> (30 January 2006); David Prest, “The Peacetime Conscripts: National Service in the Post-war Years,” [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/wwtwo/peacetime\\_conscripts.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/wwtwo/peacetime_conscripts.html) (30 January 2006); see also Royle, *The National Service Experience*, 31-32.

<sup>301</sup> Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change 1900-1967* (London: Penguin Books, 1970), 374. An independent survey reported on this social disruption: “it is more than a breakaway from education; it cuts his life into two almost unrelated parts – before and after National Service; it creates an artificial interlude in which the high hurdle still ahead of him obscures the need to plan and work for his future. ... It is the anticipation of unaccustomed discipline and a comparative shortage of money which are factors in determining this policy of ‘eat, drink and be merry’... not an unnatural attitude” (in Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War*, 375).

<sup>302</sup> A move which, contradictorily, also had popular support (Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War*, 412-13); National Service did not actually finish until 1963.

<sup>303</sup> Bill Williamson, *The Temper of the Time: British Society since World War II* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 95 and 97.

forming a shared identity. This is revealed by the number of war films made in Britain in the 1950s, recalling the common experience often with patriotism and sentimentality.

The most popular British films at the box office in the first half of the decade were either gentle parochial comedies or war films celebrating British heroism and fighting spirit.<sup>304</sup>

Films made after 1956, for example *The Bridge over the River Kwai* (1957), were, however, more questioning of the war experience and, in particular, British imperialism and the country's natural superiority. The glorification of Britain's global military standing lessened, replaced by a more self-questioning attitude. Thus, the decade saw a move from films glorifying British character and spirit to films of a more subversive nature.

The aggression and confidence that the working-class Arthur Seaton displays in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is directly connected to Britain coming towards the end of Empire. The novel asserts regional identity at a time of displacement and a new British identity created by the Second World War. Seaton's mixture of brash aggression and thoughtful introspection reflects the postwar and postcolonial insecurity and uncertainty in Britain in the 1950s. The martial climate of the 1950s influences the individual and confrontational lifestyles of the working-class characters in the novel. But Britain's new global position allows Sillitoe and other authors to create a new working-class culture. It is a culture which incorporates global trends, especially in fashion and cinema, but which emphasizes the importance of regional locality. It is also a culture that through global media such as cinema can project itself beyond its own locality. Sillitoe seizes this opportunity to present an aggressive and attractive image of the working class.

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<sup>304</sup> The descriptions in the *Time Out Film Guide* gives a clue to the nature of the most popular British films: "very, very British" (police thriller *The Blue Lamp*, 1950); "stylised English humour" (*The Happiest Days of Your Life*); "a study of the heroic spirit" (*Captain Horatio Hornblower RN*, 1951); "time-locked colonial adventure" (*Where No Vultures Fly*, 1952); "overlong, hero-worshipping stuff" (*Reach for the Sky*, 1956). *Time Out Film Guide*, ed. John Pym (London: Time Out Guides, Fourteenth Edition, 2005). See Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s: The Decline of Deference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 249, for a list of the most popular British films in the 1950s.



*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is a novel which realistically describes the experiences of a brash young working-class man. It does so to the backdrop of a Nottingham which is clearly defined through its streets, pubs, factories, and language. It deliberately depicts aspects of British life in the 1950s ignored in other accounts of working-class life: teenage violence, pre- and extramarital sex, and illegal abortion. It aggressively distances itself from the military authoritarianism of 1950s culture. It emphasizes its realism by introducing these gritty aspects of working-class life and also by emphasizing that the events occur in a postwar, postcolonial, cold war environment.

## II. Depoliticized Working-Class Anger

### 1. The Authenticity of Class

In *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Alan Sillitoe aims to give an authentic presentation of his working-class community. This authenticity is complicated by regional and national versions of the working class which compete within the novel, shaped by a political and cultural consensus forged by the Second World War, a consensus the novel wishes to challenge. The novel's authenticity is also moulded by past versions, or past mythologies, of the working class, both from a middle-class and a working-class perspective. Sillitoe is drawing upon previous politicized and aestheticized portraits of the working class in order to create his own authenticity, which is less overtly political in origin. The removal of political ideology makes the novel more acceptable to both a working-class and metropolitan audience and makes the anger and aggression of Arthur Seaton less challenging. It also makes the plot of the novel conservative, as Seaton is punished and then compelled to conform to traditional notions of class and gender.

Sillitoe's fictional portrait of the working class in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* coincided with the publication of Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957). This exhaustive study aims for a sociological authenticity; it also aims to preserve working-class culture in a historically accurate document. Like Sillitoe, Hoggart draws on existing stereotypes to create a working-class tradition which he does not feel is tangible enough to have a concrete existence. But unlike Sillitoe, Hoggart does not attempt to forge a new tradition by creating new stereotypes. He investigates the complex contradictions of the

working class, but is not fully appreciative of the fluidity of its culture. The working class he describes is stable and concrete; the working class described in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is adapting to a new global culture. Although Hoggart and Sillitoe conform to portraits of the working class in the work of Lawrence, Greenwood, and other writers of the 1930s, both are inspired by the perceived absence of a clearly-defined working-class tradition, an absence their works can fill.

Before the end of the 1950s, there had been a long series of working-class and proletarian novels, but very few had achieved commercial success. This required a working-class author such as Sillitoe to draw on his own personal experience, bringing the authenticity of his class experience to the fore. Only two books stood out for Sillitoe. In an interview published in 1979, he stated that, “The whole proletarian movement in literature before the war or between the wars really failed – with the possible exception of Walter Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole*, which was a good book.”<sup>305</sup> In his 1964 introduction to the first unabridged edition of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Sillitoe recalls reading Tressell’s novel for the first time when he was nineteen: “It certainly had a great [effect], because it has haunted me ever since. Those whose life has touched the misery recounted by Robert Tressell can get out of it many things: a bolstering of class feeling; reinforcement for their own self-pity; a call to action; maybe a good and beneficial dose of all these things.”<sup>306</sup> These two novels were important influences, for they provided Sillitoe and contemporary writers with examples of novels which had documented similar experiences to their own. However, the two novels differ sharply from *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, for they were far more politically conscious and, particularly *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, polemical.

The perceived failure of proletarian literature enabled Sillitoe to write without the politicized desire for social change. Instead, it was to the established canon of classics

<sup>305</sup> John Halperin, “Interview with Alan Sillitoe,” in *Modern Fiction Studies* 25:2 (Summer 1979), 178.

<sup>306</sup> Introduction to Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, iii.

that Sillitoe and other writers of the 1950s looked for literary inspiration. Their ambition was to become part of a tradition of European literature rather than to represent their class. David Storey has described himself as experiencing a “Damascene moment” whilst listening to a teacher reading Verlaine at school.<sup>307</sup> Sillitoe has said that, “before the age of twenty I’d read practically nothing,” before reading the established classics: Conrad, Woolf, and Forster, Dostoevsky, Hardy, and Dickens, Stendhal, Balzac, and Zola, and Lawrence.<sup>308</sup> However, Sillitoe felt that he was writing without any, or enough, literary antecedents to draw upon: “The only novels I had read, dealing more or less with the kind of life I wrote about, were Arthur Morrison’s *Child of the Jago* and Robert Tressell’s *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*.”<sup>309</sup> Dealing with Sillitoe’s contradictory statements on his work makes it difficult to judge his literary and political motivations – at different times he has pointed to different novels and novelists that he could look towards for inspiration – but a continual theme in Sillitoe’s recollections is the dearth of influences he needed to help him “[set] a story against a realistic background which nevertheless demanded the use of the imagination.”<sup>310</sup> Whilst writing *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, he wrote, more generally, in his notebook:

The conspicuous tradition of inspired writing passed on from writer to writer seems to have discontinued since Lawrence died. He had Hardy and Meredith. What have we? We have to forge new links and fasten somehow to the old chain so that people will again think writers have something to say ...<sup>311</sup>

It was not until 1950, whilst studying at the WEA, that he read Lawrence for the first time: “His work was a revelation in showing that great fiction could be written with a local setting, and one that I knew so well.”<sup>312</sup> Like many working-class writers before him, the regional location and class background of Lawrence’s work gave Sillitoe a foundation

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<sup>307</sup> Interview with David Storey in the *Guardian* (31 January, 2004).

<sup>308</sup> Halperin, “Interview with Sillitoe,” in *Modern Fiction Studies* 25:2, 179.

<sup>309</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *Life Without Armour: An Autobiography* (London: Robson Books, 2004 [1995]), 223.

<sup>310</sup> Sillitoe, *Life Without Armour*, 223.

<sup>311</sup> Sillitoe, *Life Without Armour*, 222-23.

<sup>312</sup> Sillitoe, *Life Without Armour*, 158.

for his fiction. But this creates a pressure of comparison. The back cover of my edition of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* carries a quote from the *Sunday Express*: “Miles nearer the real thing than D. H. Lawrence’s mystic, brooding working-men ever came.”<sup>313</sup> This example of meaningless journalese demonstrates the inevitable comparison that an author such as Sillitoe was likely to attract. It also highlights the emphasis commonly placed on a novel’s authenticity and the literary virtue that results. Allen Richard Penner, in his 1972 study of Sillitoe, states the difference between the two Nottinghamshire novelists in similar terms: “It never occurs to [Sillitoe] that he could look upon the poor from any point of view than that of an insider,” in contrast to Lawrence, who “leaves the distinct impression that he has removed himself from the life he describes ... he is not similarly involved with the people who share his social origins.”<sup>314</sup> Here, Penner is falling into the trap of seeing Sillitoe’s work as a documentary authentically recording the social reality and forgetting that he is a novelist producing a fictional form of the life around him. As I shall show, the authenticity of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* gives it much of its power and popularity, but it is an authenticity complicated by Sillitoe’s literary impulses, the complexities of class and region affiliations, and by fictional representation of a politically fluid working-class community.

Sillitoe, like Lawrence, was uncertain about basing his novels around working-class Nottingham life. Both before and after the success of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* he steered clear of class-centred fiction. Instead of writing about Nottingham life at the beginning of his career, he wrote several colonial- and war-inspired novels, which, despite “assuming that my experiences in Malaya might be interesting to others,” were all rejected.<sup>315</sup> The impulse to write was not to record the life he had known, nor to give a political expression to the struggles of the working class. The stories that became *Saturday*

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<sup>313</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (London: Flamingo, 1994 [1958]). Henceforth abbreviated *SN*.

<sup>314</sup> Allen Richard Penner, *Alan Sillitoe* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972), 15-16.

<sup>315</sup> Sillitoe, *Life Without Armour*, 153.

*Night and Sunday Morning* were only written on the advice of Robert Graves, who, on reading the manuscript of *Mr Allen's Island*, a cold war science fiction satire, suggested, "Why don't you write something set in Nottingham? That's the place you know best."<sup>316</sup> After the success of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, he returned to the fiction he had been writing in the early 1950s, which, on reading *The General*, prompted reviewer Walter Allen to advise him to "get back to your factory-hands."<sup>317</sup> As with Lawrence, the advice of friends and critics was that writing about first-hand experience was the most prudent manner to achieve both literary and commercial success.

Many reviewers at the time emphasized Sillitoe's accurate account of working-class life not just of Nottingham but of Britain. One local paper, the *Guardian Journal*, wrote that he had "successfully captured a whole class, the working-class of Britain in the post-war era ... the story ... might be told of a large section of the workers in any city anywhere in Britain."<sup>318</sup> This was a common reaction and many reviewers praised Sillitoe for his authentic rendering of working-class life, more than for the literary accomplishment. Within these limited terms, some saw the novel as proof that working-class literature had finally come of age. Anthony West in the *New Yorker* felt that Sillitoe had not sacrificed his knowledge of working-class life to further his literary ambition and that with Sillitoe this life was, for the first time, being "written by someone who understands it and its values."<sup>319</sup> More recently, Melvyn Bragg has stated, inaccurately but voicing a popular perception, that he is "a writer who has tried to tell the truth about a section of society that was, until he came along, largely ignored."<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Sillitoe, *Life Without Armour*, 209.

<sup>317</sup> Quoted in Hilliard, *To Exercise our Talents*, 254.

<sup>318</sup> Stanley S. Atherton, *Alan Sillitoe: A Critical Assessment* (London: W. H. Allen, 1979), 112.

<sup>319</sup> Quoted in Atherton, *Alan Sillitoe: A Critical Assessment*, 11.

<sup>320</sup> In the *Guardian*, 3 April 2004.

These avowals of the novel's authenticity have rarely been disputed. Nigel Gray, in his highly personal overview of 1950s and 1960s working-class fiction, *The Silent Majority* (1973), is less sure of Sillitoe's portrait, particularly of Arthur Seaton, the novel's young working-class hero. Gray states that, "Sillitoe is too much taken with the working-class hero cult," feeling that "Sillitoe is too involved."<sup>321</sup> Gray's discussion of the novels he chooses is too simplistic, but he points to the complexities of authenticity in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. The novel's authenticity is both forged and challenged by individual character, region, and period. The authentic portrait is necessarily fictionalized and depends on the author's version of authenticity.

*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* was written throughout the 1950s, as were *Room at the Top* and *This Sporting Life*, which was Storey's seventh attempt to write a novel. It is dangerous to imply that these three novels reflect the state of the nation and of the working class at the end of the decade. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is loosely set in the first half of the decade, as references to the Kenya Emergency and the housing shortage imply (*SN*, 132 and 157). Christopher Hilliard stresses the authors' distance from the novels' apparent topicality: "*Room at the Top* is often seen as a fable of affluence, but it was conceived in the period of austerity, when Braine himself was living a fairly straitened existence."<sup>322</sup> The novel is quite clearly set in the years of austerity immediately following the war, yet reviewers immediately latched on to the notion that the novel reflected the state of the nation: "if you want to know the way in which the young products of the Welfare State are feeling and reacting, *Room at the Top* will tell you."<sup>323</sup> Although this is a logical reaction – published in 1957, the novel captures a universal feeling of ambitious working-class affluence – it is misleading. *Room at the Top*, *Saturday*

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<sup>321</sup> Nigel Gray, *The Silent Majority: A Study of the Working Class in Post-War British Fiction* (London: Vision, 1973), 113 and 131. As his case studies, Gray chooses *Kes (sic)*, *Billy Liar*, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, *This Sporting Life*, and *Alfie*.

<sup>322</sup> Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents*, 251.

<sup>323</sup> Richard Lester quoted in Marwick, "The 'Cultural Revolution' in Britain," in *Contemporary History* 19:1, 131.

*Night and Sunday Morning*, and *This Sporting Life* are the results of an imaginative impulse to escape the austerity and drabness that dominated the early 1950s: to *produce* a social or literary mobility upwards for themselves rather than to *record* the social mobility that was sensed at the end of the decade. David Storey has said that the group of regional, working-class writers created an “ethos which spun you along for a while, but the volition to write was much more personal than anything that came from being in a movement.”<sup>324</sup> There was no formal grouping of working-class regional writers, setting out to record together the lives of those around them; instead, the impulse to write was individual and apolitical.

Although the reasons for writing were quite independent of a shared desire to record the experiences of their region and people, the result was a powerful, simultaneous expression, felt by readers from all backgrounds. Sillitoe himself recognized the reasons for *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*'s success: “... here was a piece of writing about a certain number of people, which didn't write down to them and which appeared, at any rate, to have been written from right in the middle of them. ... someone wrote it who'd lived among them for the first twenty years of his life.”<sup>325</sup> He was sceptical, though, about the emphasis placed on the novel's authenticity. Sillitoe had spent most of the 1950s living in Mallorca, distant, geographically and also culturally, from the environment he was writing about. He described himself, with disingenuousness, as “bringing my experience from the Forties up into the Fifties.”<sup>326</sup> The novel itself he felt wasn't “autobiographical but ... sort of against the backdrop of what was my reality in life,” a mixture of “the imagination ... my memory and my experience.”<sup>327</sup> Sillitoe repeatedly emphasizes this mixture of imagination and experience, without clearly distinguishing the two, which creates a tension between realism and the illusion of authenticity.

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<sup>324</sup> Interview in the *Guardian*, 31 January, 2004.

<sup>325</sup> Halperin, “Interview with Sillitoe,” in *Modern Fiction Studies* 19:2, 178.

<sup>326</sup> Halperin, “Interview with Sillitoe,” in *Modern Fiction Studies* 19:2, 176.

<sup>327</sup> Halperin, “Interview with Sillitoe,” in *Modern Fiction Studies* 19:2, 176 and 182.



David Storey, too, drew on his feeling of being an outsider – the son of a miner studying at Slade during the week and at the weekend the art student from London playing rugby league for Leeds “A” team: “I only really felt at home on the train, where the two different parts of my life came together.”<sup>328</sup> Although his experiences as a rugby league player growing up in a northern industrial town are central to the novel, his feeling of being an outsider is transferred on to the figure of Arthur Machin, like Arthur Seaton breaking, but inhibited by, social bounds.

With Sillitoe writing in Mallorca and Storey studying in London, the concept of authenticity becomes confused. They were self-conscious semi-outsiders writing about what they had experienced and observed. To attempt to pursue a literary career immediately made the writer different from the norms of his community. Although both Sillitoe and Storey themselves experienced these norms – as factory worker and rugby league player – they found it necessary to distance themselves geographically from their communities in order to emphasize their cultural distance.

This is even more apparent in *Room at the Top*, which is directly concerned with social escape from a working-class background. The working-class community is not central to the novel, but a looming presence from a rejected past. Again, Braine’s biography accounts in part for this distance. His parents had moved into the lower-middle class, a gradual social mobility distorted in *Room at the Top* into overt, cruel ambition. Lampton’s social position in the novel is uneasy, further emphasized by the fact that Braine’s “family were Catholic, which meant that they were firmly excluded from mainstream middle-class life in Bradford.”<sup>329</sup> This confused social position was furthered by his decision to move to London to become a writer.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Interview in the *Guardian*, 31 January 2004.

<sup>329</sup> Marwick, “The ‘Cultural Revolution’ in Britain,” in *Contemporary History* 19:1, 131.

<sup>330</sup> For a fictional account of Braine’s experiences as a lower-middle-class Catholic living in London, see his novel *The Crying Game* (1967).

In the following sections, I explore in close detail the concept of authenticity in opposition to the authors' motivations for describing and investigating a working-class community. I examine several aspects of the novels against the backdrop of 1950s working-class culture to consider and challenge their use of working-class authenticity and I finish by considering how the film adaptations alter and shape that authenticity. I demonstrate that the novels and films are part of a working-class tradition still taking shape, a tradition which is inherited, incorporated, and partially rejected.

## 2. The Politics of Affluence

The series of working-class novels published at the end of the decade are in direct contrast to the novels published in the 1930s, in which a political stance was directly incorporated into the fiction. The political basis of 1930s fiction was, however, often forced by socialist involvement in proletarian literature. The literary impulse to write was conditioned by the perceived political necessity to represent the author's class. In general, the literature of the 1950s was far more depoliticized. Although many writers were grouped together under the label of "Angry Young Men," there was no common political – or even specifically literary – motivation connecting the writers. Sillitoe himself, who was rather belatedly added into the group with the publication of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, has dismissed the label as a "total misnomer."<sup>331</sup> Many of these writers shared a dissatisfaction expressed in stark terms, but this dissatisfaction was never directly focused – either by the writers themselves or the journalists who latched on to the term. What connected the writers – Wain, Amis, Osborne, Braine, and then Sillitoe – was a regional anti-metropolitanism based on class disaffection, revolving around

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<sup>331</sup> Halperin, "Interview with Sillitoe," in *Modern Fiction Studies* 19:2, 182.

confusion of identity in postwar Britain. Despite his admiration for the novel, Sillitoe has described *Room at the Top* as not “really ‘deal[ing] with’ anything,” and, although *Look Back in Anger* had a powerful effect on him, he felt that Osborne was given, rather than expressed, political viewpoints: “He was put into some sort of left-wing anarchistic bracket, which was totally unrealistic.”<sup>332</sup>

In the same interview, Sillitoe distanced himself from any possible political sentiments in either *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* or *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, refusing to view his writing in political or specifically socialist terms. His views on class are confused, but his emphasis is that the anger expressed by the novels’ protagonists is not generated by class resentment. In regard to *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, he says that, “I don’t think the class war ever came into it. He was fighting people of his own class. Also I don’t believe in class at all, ever. I believe in individuals from A to Zed.”<sup>333</sup> Sillitoe then goes on to explain why there is a lack of political sentiment in both novels, despite a clear presence of class barriers:

I believe [class] exists, because of course money creates class, which is obvious. ... But as a writer I never could see people in class terms – you know, in the Marxist class business. I’ve never seen them that way – even when I was in a factory, wherever I was. I’ve seen hierarchies, I’ve seen meritocracies, I’ve noticed people with and without money, but I’ve never broken them down into classes in my own consciousness.<sup>334</sup>

Sillitoe has repeated his distance from any political sentiments in the novel. He emphasizes that the anger expressed in his work is not class-based, which for him adds to its authenticity, for it is not ideologically motivated. He has said that in both the novel and the film adaptation that,

I don’t think there was anything political. I think the frustration came from being a young man. Isn’t every young man sort of raring to go angry about what’s been done to stop him or thinks is being done to stop him? ... I based Arthur Seaton on characters I know in the factory who were indeed sizzling with anger.<sup>335</sup>

<sup>332</sup> Halperin, “Interview with Sillitoe,” in *Modern Fiction Studies* 19:2, 181.

<sup>333</sup> Halperin, “Interview with Sillitoe,” in *Modern Fiction Studies* 19:2, 183.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> DVD commentary on *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, dir. Karel Reisz (BFI DVD, 1998), at 1:18:11 to 1:20:14.

Politics are not absent from the novel, but political identification is. Peter Kalliney remarks that Arthur Seaton's "political dissatisfaction" is provoked by a "political stance [which] is contingent and unstable."<sup>336</sup> However, the politics of Seaton are not so much destabilized as never clearly identified or particularized. Seaton's politics, elucidated in rare statements, are contradictory, at once thoughtful and impulsive, echoing Hoggart's definition of working-class politics in *The Uses of Literacy*: the working class "have a limited realism," which makes most "non-political and non-metaphysical in their outlook." Their political views are "a bundle of largely unexamined and orally-transmitted tags, enshrining generalizations, prejudices, and half-truths, and elevated by epigrammatic phrasing into the status of maxims."<sup>337</sup> Hoggart and Sillitoe are rejecting Marxist interpretations of the working class which emphasize their political commitment. The climate of the 1950s, less political than the 1930s, enables Hoggart and Sillitoe to emphasize the political confusion and, more importantly, indifference of the working class. In working-class fiction, this indifference has been repeatedly revealed, but in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* it becomes foregrounded. Arthur Seaton's political musings are a form of rhetoric designed to impress or incite the listener, but their consistent basis is in a self-orientated individualism. He does not like being told what to do, whether it be by patrician parliamentarians or by communists who would take away his wages:

"Tek them blokes as spout on boxes outside the factory sometimes. I like to hear 'em talk about Russia, about farms and power-stations they've got, because it's interestin', but when they say that when they get in government everybody's got to share and share alike, then that's another thing. I ain't a communist, I tell you. I like 'em though, because they're different from these big fat Tory bastards in parliament. And them Labour bleeders too. They rob our wage packets every week with insurance tax and try to tell us it's all for our own good." (SN, 35-36)

The anger and aggression which define the character of Arthur Seaton are apolitical, in a decade of consensus politics. The working-class literature of the late 1950s has

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<sup>336</sup> Peter Kalliney, "Cities of Affluence: Masculinity, Class, and the Angry Young Men," in *Modern Fiction Studies* 47:1 (Spring 2001), 93.

<sup>337</sup> Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 102-103.

discovered a new self-confidence, which does not need to be tied to a political cause. Any political affiliation is to be discarded; it either suggests a naïve sacrifice to an unbeneficial cause or – except for the Conservative Club – it is an encumbrance; Joe Lampton remembers his father as “too good a workman to be sacked and too outspoken about his Labour convictions to be promoted.”<sup>338</sup> Instead, Arthur Seaton, Arthur Machin, and Joe Lampton strive to attain personal, rather than class, advancement, most clearly seen in the material goods they are able to buy from their success, in order to show off to those around them. These are three characters firmly rooted in an age of affluence.

Kalliney comments on Seaton’s incoherent, contradictory attitude towards everything, especially towards class. Kalliney links this confusion to the welfare state: “The persistence of his anger and his inability to coherently identify its source betray both the state’s centrality in the creation and maintenance of class relations and its ambiguous stance: we cannot say that the state is either ‘for’ or ‘against’ the working class in any meaningful way.”<sup>339</sup> Due to the protection of the welfare state and security of the industrial sector in which Seaton works, he has a steady, undemanding job which provides him with enough money to live on comfortably. Because of these wages, he is able to live the life he chooses – a life based on self-gratifying pleasure. Seaton is financially satisfied by his job, but not intellectually, which gives rise to his resentment against authority. Seaton’s anger is incoherent and wide-ranging, but is subconsciously produced by the economic and political conditions around him which he half identifies. His anger is more indicative, not of a politicized resentment as Kalliney tries to argue, but of a general youthful aggression formed from a new unfocused independence and a belligerent climate – the cold war, the Suez crisis, the Korean war, ongoing colonial conflicts, and National Service.

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<sup>338</sup> John Braine, *Room at the Top* (London: Arrow Books, 2002 [1957]), 94. Henceforth abbreviated RT.

<sup>339</sup> Kalliney, “Cities of Affluence,” in *Modern Fiction Studies* 47:1, 111.

The 1950s saw a gradual transition from austerity to affluence. The imagery and the tangible results of affluence run through all three novels, in which we witness the progress of three solipsistic characters whose identity is based on a determination to better their lot. In *Room at the Top*, the nature of the affluence differs from the other two novels, for it is set in the years immediately following the war. However, it too contrasts this individual ambition to furnish oneself with the luxuries of affluence with prewar contentment with survival and a modest lifestyle. Joe Lampton returns both in person and in memory to his hometown of Dufton, which symbolizes a working-class provincialism with no ambition to move upwards. His cousins are “heading straight for the mills and apparently perfectly happy with it,” in direct contrast to Lampton, who announces his intent early on: “I wanted an Aston-Martin, I wanted a three-guinea linen shirt, I wanted a girl with a Riviera suntan – these were my rights, I felt, a signed and sealed legacy” (RT, 14 and 29). Although *Room at the Top*, as Hilliard points out, is not “a fable of affluence,” it was nevertheless published in 1957, at a time when Harold Macmillan was declaring that the people of Britain had never had it so good. The novel is centred on the cruel ambition of one individual to move upwards socially and does not attempt to draw a representative image of postwar Britain and its move into shared affluence and class mobility. However, the success of the novel and the subsequent film was due in large part to the way it tied in with the individual and national success that people were experiencing. They could see represented the austerity and deprivation they had experienced before and during the war transformed into affluence, enabling them to identify with Joe Lampton’s social mobility and Aston Martin.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> The individualist ambition of Joe Lampton and Arthur Seaton in their carefree attitude to women and desire for tangible symbols of their affluence echoes that of James Bond, another antihero from 1950s English literature. Although popular spy fiction, Ian Fleming’s Bond novels share with 1950s working-class fiction a projection of a coolly attractive Britain, rejecting traditional stereotypes and changing Britain’s national image on an international stage.

In both *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *This Sporting Life*, the imagery of affluence is incorporated more directly. These were novels written during, and set in, the 1950s and the tangible results of increased affluence are vividly presented. For Seaton himself, luxurious commodities are the deserved result of his work in the factory. With his expensive clothes, he is showing to his family, to women, to the town in general, his successful lifestyle. In *This Sporting Life*, there is a similar desire to prove oneself through the spending of hard-earned wages. For Arthur Machin, it is a means of impressing his widowed landlady; he buys a Jaguar and drives her into the countryside, as well as a television set and a fridge, in order to show her how successful he is. He is not like her dead husband, who had settled unambitiously into his allocated lot, but a successful rugby league player, able to spend his wages extravagantly on her and still have money left over. This aggressive demonstration of his personal affluence is distinctive of the way the characters in the three novels are determined to show to anyone looking how successful they are. It is not a personal achievement to be enjoyed privately, or a community achievement to be shared, but a personal achievement to be demonstrated. At one point, Machin visits a newly-married friend, who proudly shows him the commodities in her new house. She is only married because of an unexpected pregnancy, but she is enjoying the tangible benefits of owning her own newly-built house. Machin follows her around the house, noting the transformation that personal affluence has affected in her. She proudly lists the kitchen's many commodities:

We came into the kitchen at the back of the house – it was surrounded on three sides by chromium fittings. “There’re the sink and the taps. A heater. Airing cupboard, ordinary cupboards, shelves, an electric dryer, and bits and pieces. Daddy bought it for us. What d’you think?”

“Some people have nice daddies. It’s the best I ever saw. Haven’t you got a fridge?”

She took it seriously. “We’ll soon get one.”<sup>341</sup>

Kalliney argues that Arthur Seaton’s class consciousness is conditioned by his masculinity in an age of affluence: “Arthur only ‘lives’ a working-class position through

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<sup>341</sup> David Storey, *This Sporting Life* (London: Vintage, 2000 [1960]), 202. Henceforth abbreviated *TSL*.

his roles as consumer and family provider, sexually free bachelor, and potential family man.”<sup>342</sup> It is this depoliticized realism which distinguishes *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* from *Love on the Dole*, in which the emasculation of Harry Hardcastle and other men – through the loss of their jobs and their inability to provide for their family – is blamed on the state and is used to appeal to the reader to alleviate such poverty.

However, Harry Hardcastle too is a consumer and family provider (until he loses his job), a sexually free bachelor (he gets his girlfriend pregnant), and, like Seaton, he ends the novel married. One of the main differences between the two characters is that Hardcastle is unemployed and seeks – half-heartedly – a political explanation and solution, whereas Seaton is employed and rejects politics, instead seeking personal satisfaction through his spending power. It is this affluence which causes a new-found working-class confidence, not needing the politics of socialism to support it.

But it is not only Seaton’s masculinity which is conditioned by his affluence. As is made clear by the above example from *This Sporting Life* of the newly-wedded woman showing off her new house, femininity too is affected by this new affluence – through the financial success of their boyfriends and husbands and also through their own job security. In *Love on the Dole*, poverty corrupts Sally Hardcastle into a form of prostitution, an undermining of traditional notions of femininity designed to shock the novel’s readers. Job security in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* not only strengthens Seaton’s masculinity, it also gives the women in the novel greater stability and self-confidence.

Just as the role of women in the 1950s was complicated by a combination of greater social freedom and greater social constraints, so too their role in all three novels is confused. There is a sureness and confidence to their attitude and language, for example a condescending maturity in their manner towards the predatory men they meet. But this confidence is undermined by the suffering these men force them to endure – the illegal

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<sup>342</sup> Kalliney, “Cities of Affluence,” in *Modern Fiction Studies* 47:1, 111.



abortion Brenda undergoes in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, the social humiliation which Mrs. Hammond suffers in *This Sporting Life*, and the cruelty Joe Lampton inflicts on Alice which leads to her gruesome death in a car crash in *Room at the Top*. All three of these relationships are illicit and, although this reflects the overt challenge to moral boundaries, all of the female characters suffer in a particularly physical way. Male characters also suffer physically – for example, the beating of Seaton by the two soldiers – but this is a natural consequence of the conflict they are willingly fighting; female suffering is an unnatural consequence of this ongoing male battle.

This is a direct result of the importance of affluence in the novels. Money brings the ability and the right to possess and depossess. Arthur Seaton views women as commodities, to be used for his own pleasure just as his wages allow him to enjoy himself using other leisure commodities. Again, in *Room at the Top* the two women, Alice and Susan, are seen as symbols of Lampton's social progress. It is not that the women are seen by the authors in misogynist terms, but that they become examples and victims of the social and class dilemmas being aggressively addressed by the male characters. This is most subtly played out in *This Sporting Life*, in which Storey seems more aware of the consequences on the female characters of male egocentrism. Women in the novels are used – self-consciously by the authors and the male characters – to act out and develop the male characters' masculinity. This is something similar to what Lawrence was doing in *Sons and Lovers*, in which Paul Morel questions his own masculinity in relation to the femininity of Miriam and Clara. Of the three authors, only Storey is able to replicate the success of Lawrence in distinguishing the roles that men and women play in shaping each other's identity.

The uneasy relationships between the male protagonists and women are another means the authors use to reveal the changing social and moral boundaries in working-class communities. The position of women as sexual commodities is not unusual for the

decade – compare *Lucky Jim*, in which there is a much clearer, if comically-presented, misogyny, or the Bond novels written in the 1950s, in which beautiful women are both a social asset and commodity – yet the male characters do have a confused affection for them which complicates, and causes them to question, their selfish desire for personal gain.<sup>343</sup>

The representation of women in the novels fits into their attempted realism. In all three novels, there are two types of woman: the unmarried working girl on the look out for a possible husband and the married housewife. The imagery of affluence – of possession – is used in *This Sporting Life* to indicate the social and financial importance attached by women to marriage. Work is a temporary status, which allows the money for leisure and assists the search for an ideal husband: “You don’t know what those girls go through every Saturday night at the Mecca. It’s more or less an auction sale, and they’re terrified of going to the wrong bidder” (*TSL*, 205). Feminine ambition is confined by traditional notions of marriage. These notions too confine Seaton’s masculinity, but for Doreen marriage is a permanent change in lifestyle, from workplace to home. Marriage is a way of securing affluence, a means of securing financial stability and social reputation; love is not mentioned. As soon as Seaton meets Doreen, her expectations are made clear. She is “afraid of being ‘left on the shelf’” and so on meeting Seaton she is relieved to see what she terms the ideal man:

She created his image: a tall young man of the world, nearly twenty-three and already a long way past his military service, a man who had been a good soldier and who was now a good worker because he was earning fourteen pounds a week on piecework. He would also make a good husband, there being no doubt of this because above all he was kind and attentive. What’s more, he was good-looking, was tall, thin, had fair hair. What girl wouldn’t be happy with a man like that? (*SN*, 155)

In Seaton she has found something quite different: a man currently involved with two married sisters and with an egocentric view of the world. But using the force of social

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<sup>343</sup> The film rights to the Bond novels were bought by Harry Saltzman on the profits made by the film version of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*.

respectability, she tames his need for constant conflict and belligerent independence. His economic affluence has given him a social freedom to do what he wishes; although marriage is a restraint on this freedom, it gives him a security and stability that he has not previously attained. Social conflict comes to an end, as he settles down to a life of work, which generates financial comfort, and home, kept by the efficient housewife.

The politics of affluence result in a working-class anger that is depoliticized, unfocused, and ultimately conservative. Affluence conditions the class feeling of characters such as Arthur Seaton, reducing the ideological appeal of traditional socialist politics. The rebellion of Arthur Seaton is against that conditioning, but the rebellion is aimed at producing an individual freedom. His rebellion, however, fails, for he is punished for his sexual transgressions and is then forced to conform to social expectations by marrying Doreen and setting up a family. Conflict in the novel is a wilful battle for survival and for identity. In *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, male working-class identity is seen through the limited view of Arthur Seaton – as aggressive, sexual, and hedonistic. It is only female working-class identity which challenges this viewpoint and forces him to change his lifestyle. Despite his frank analyses of his motivations, Arthur Seaton is less self-aware than Paul Morel of the consequences of his actions. He is also ultimately less rebellious for he follows the traditions and customs of his working-class community. Arthur Seaton's rebellion is based on the cultural opposites of the security of affluence and the insecurity of war.

### 3. Military and Social Conflicts

The Second World War is the bridge that connects the working-class poverty of the early 1930s with the affluence of the late 1950s. It frames the development of working-class culture and identity from regional poverty to national affluence. It also enables

working-class youth to reject the mythological stereotypes of the past and forge an independent future. Yet it creates an environment of aggressive conflict, of an individualism rejecting the collective unity which has been traditionally associated with working-class identity. This aggressive rejection of past myths creates a new myth forged by the military ethos of the Second World War and the cold war.

Sillitoe has said, “[Life]’s a conflict. ... There are conflicts which are wasteful of human resources and then there are creative conflicts, which is somehow bringing it up to another sort of level – which enables you, in fact, to create a better life.”<sup>344</sup> The imagery of conflict dominates all three novels. In *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Seaton views the world around him in warlike terms. In the vivid opening scene of the novel, Seaton engages in a drinking competition with someone who “reminded Arthur of a sergeant-major” (SN, 11). Immediately, we see the world Seaton inhabits: one of constant conflict in which he tries to outdo those around him, influenced by his National Service experiences and by the international conflicts of the 1950s. It is the ethos of war which provokes his individualism, in contrast to the feeling of unity and community that the Second World War is supposed to have inspired in the British people. He sees war in economic terms, for it has rid the country of the prewar poverty and ushered in an age of affluence and prosperity: “War was a marvellous thing in many ways, when you thought about how happy it had made so many people in England” (SN, 27).

*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* was written through the 1950s, a decade in which Britain was recovering from the Second World War and in which the cold war was being acted out internationally. Sillitoe frames it in the context of his upbringing: “I grew up under the shadow of the Great War ... and then all my childhood was taken up with the threat of another war, and then my youth came during the next war.”<sup>345</sup> The Second World War retained a powerful presence in the imagination of the British people,

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<sup>344</sup> Halperin, “Interview with Sillitoe,” in *Modern Fiction Studies* 19:2, 185.

<sup>345</sup> Halperin, “Interview with Sillitoe,” in *Modern Fiction Studies* 19:2, 187.

powerful enough to ensure the maintenance of consensus politics and the welfare state until the 1970s. In many of the novels of the 1950s, the war is remembered and recalled, memories of death, loss, and togetherness framing the current reality. In *Room at the Top*, set just after the war and filled by memories, reflections, and echoes of wartime experiences, Joe Lampton walks past the gap left by his bombed-out home in which his parents were killed. For Lampton, “wherever he looked” in his hometown of Dufton “there was a memory, an italicizing of death” (RT, 96). It is not just the war he remembers and wishes to forget, but also the unambitious, stable, working-class family past. He wishes to move on and begin an independent, ambitious, socially mobile life, leaving behind this destruction, hardship, and austerity, living in “a place without memories” rather than in “the chilly bedroom with its hideous wallpaper and view of mill-chimneys and middens, the bath with its peeling enamel, the scratchy blankets” (RT, 96). This mirrors the attitude to the First World War in *Love on the Dole*, in which the war is a threatening presence, accounting for the doom-laden poverty that young working-class men cannot escape. But in *Love on the Dole*, many characters have a nostalgia for a mythical prewar idyll; in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, *Room at the Top*, and *This Sporting Life* the war separates the characters from poverty and economic dependence.

Attitudes to family also emphasize this rejection of the past. In *Room at the Top* and *This Sporting Life*, Lampton’s and Machin’s dislocation from their class is emphasized by their both living in lodgings; cut-off from their families, they are deliberately moving away from the prewar experience of class subjection. Independence from the family is integral to the protagonists of all three novels, achieved through job security, ambition, and self-orientated ideals. In *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Seaton’s parents embrace the luxury of affluence and family life remains central to Seaton’s lifestyle. But Arthur Seaton also inhabits a very different world from that of his parents before the Second World War. He envisions his mother “trott[ing] around to the various shops asking for some on

tick till Thursday dole-day,” compared to the “solid wages that stopped worry at the source” which she enjoys in the 1950s (*SN*, 47). The work environment has changed completely: Seaton and his father’s jobs are secure, their wages are regular and high, and life at home, with domestic commodities such as the television and the fridge, is much more comfortable. Seaton reflects on how life must have been for his father “in the bad days talked about” when a weekly wage was “seven-and-tuppence” rather than the “fourteen quid” Seaton receives (*SN*, 61). This is a past which causes him to reflect on his class and his origins, but which merely confirms his present good fortune, which is to be embraced.

A selfish attitude to war runs through the novel. In marked contrast to the mythical unity of the Second World War, Seaton’s cousins, following family tradition, used the war for their own advantage. All three of them spent the war on the run after deserting the army, joking proudly that they had served in “The Royal Corps of Deserters” (*SN*, 199); their exploits are consolidated by the two pictures which hang on the living room wall, “plundered ... from France in the war before the last” by their “boozing bombardier” father (*SN*, 74). This treachery, which is presented comically and affectionately, goes against traditional notions of wartime patriotism.<sup>346</sup> Although they spend some time during the war in gaol, they do not suffer for their desertion and after the war they too enjoy affluence, prosperity, and consequent stability. Their experiences also inform Seaton’s use of the army and of war for his own purposes. Sillitoe drew on his own family experiences in making Seaton’s cousins deserters, seeing it as a natural part of working-class life: “Lots of my family went into the army and they were all deserters. They just didn’t have anything to do with it. ... There’s a working-class tradition which says that you join the army because that’s the only way of getting out of

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<sup>346</sup> Another comic and affectionate presentation of wartime individualism can be seen in *Dad’s Army*’s black marketeer Private Walker; viewed as naturally untrustworthy, he is nevertheless tolerated as a provider of rare commodities.

your local area. Another tradition says you never join the army under any circumstances.”<sup>347</sup> Hoggart also emphasizes “the general lack of patriotism,” which is due to a natural working-class anti-authoritarianism.<sup>348</sup> Attitudes to war form part of the working-class community’s rejection of national in favour of regional identity and an assertion of local, traditional values.

It is not only the Second World War which dominates the novel, for Britain’s military role in the 1950s is also apparent. Winnie’s husband is serving with the MPs in Germany; Seaton takes advantage of his absence to have an affair with her. It is her husband who finally gives Seaton his comeuppance and with another soldier beats him up; as Seaton goes down fighting, he thinks to himself that “the war was on at last” (*SN*, 174). Seaton views the army as an unnatural disturbance of normal family life, for, in his view, a working man’s place is in the factory and with his wife: “I can’t understand a bloke, as signs on for the army, especially when he’s married ... the sooner he’s home the better, then he can look after you as a bloke should. He can get a job and settle down, and bring a regular pay-packet into the house every Friday” (*SN*, 95-96).

Sillitoe uses wartime experiences and war imagery to reject a mythical notion of collective unity, portraying an individualistic working class not united by collective experience or politics. But he also describes a society disrupted by Britain’s military activities. Death, as well as fierce individualism, separates the past from the present. These experiences demonstrate a class spread around the country and the world, regional affiliations lost in the army and National Service. Britain’s colonialism affects the make up of the British working class, changes regional identities, and exposes the working class to new cultures which threaten their own.

Despite the family tradition, one of Seaton’s cousins is serving with the Royal Engineers in Africa and a friend of his visits the family at Christmas. In *Saturday Night and*

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<sup>347</sup> Halperin, “Interview with Sillitoe,” in *Modern Fiction Studies* 19:2, 187-88.

<sup>348</sup> Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 94.

*Sunday Morning*, Nottingham is presented as a largely homogeneous city – apart from a brief reference to Irish navvies whose appetite for violence impresses even Seaton (*SN*, 146). The visit of the black soldier, Sam, is one of the few examples in the novel when someone from outside the community is present. His presence is greeted with a bemused warmth, a mixture of friendly acceptance and unconscious racism. Richard Hoggart wrote at the time of the “rudimentary internationalism” of the working class, which “can co-exist with anti-Semitism or with strong feeling against Roman Catholicism.” Hoggart is rather naïve in his view that “such intolerance comes out only occasionally,” but like Greenwood in *Love on the Dole* he is reluctant to allow working-class racism to affect his positive portrait of the working class.<sup>349</sup> Greenwood, Hoggart, and Sillitoe further distort their picture of the working class, by making it ethnically homogenous. This allows the working class to fit into a national culture. But by the late 1950s, this ethnic homogeneity is challenged by global culture and by postcolonial migration; in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* this challenge is felt as a threat or ignored.

Sam is referred to as a “Zulu” who “misses the tom-toms” (*SN*, 192), but he is also taken out on the town and made to feel at home. The racism is unreflective and jocular, a long way from the racial tensions felt in British cities at the end of the decade. This in part is due to Sillitoe writing the novel whilst in Mallorca, before the racial disturbances arose in Notting Hill and Nottingham. But Sam is accommodated into the family’s Christmas celebrations mainly because he is not a threatening presence. Although he holds an erotic appeal for the women in the family, his is only a passing visit and he is not going to take away anyone’s woman or job. This unthreatening presence of colonial Britain is taken further by the Indian who lives with Seaton’s fiancée’s mother. Not speaking a word of English, he remains silent. Like Sam, his presence does not threaten.

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid.



His silence – Sam also says little – emphasizes his position of displaced outsider, an uncertain glimpse of postcolonial Britain.

The homogeneity of the Nottingham working-class community creates an unthreatening portrait of the working class. Working-class identity, solidified by the Second World War and by economic affluence, remains unchallenged, a new, independent, and confident identity forged by their own actions rather than those from outside. Sillitoe creates a new myth of the English working class: young, affluent, independent, and white. Conflict is self-generated, a means of securing personal identity, but it is not a conflict based on political or social resentment.

The only element of outside society seen in the novel which threatens – and threatens to shape – working-class identity is National Service. Seaton's time doing National Service is the one moment in the novel when his economic and personal freedom is constrained. It reveals Seaton's attitude to authority when it attempts to confine him. Feelings of war-inspired patriotism are sharply absent, due in part to the resentment Seaton feels at being told what to do. On top of this resentment is the bitterness he feels at the government's inability or unwillingness to protect its people. He recalls his relatives on the dole and identifies with his cousins' refusal to fight during the war for a country which had only punished him and his family; Seaton strongly approves of one of his cousin's anti-patriotic rallying call: "Do yer think I'm going ter fight for them bastards, do yer?" (*SN*, 130).

This lack of patriotism, going against the national feeling of wartime unity, conditions Seaton's own anti-authoritarianism, particularly at a time when "they were angling for another war now, with the Russians this time" (*SN*, 132). He takes delight in echoing the popular mantra, "F--- you, Jack, I'm all right" (*SN*, 132) to emphasize his anti-authoritarian individualism. Within the army, he feels constrained by becoming a stereotypical figure to the authorities, to the sergeant-major nothing more than "a six-

foot pit-prop that wants a pint of ale.” His constant rebellion against authority is explained in his belief that “he was nothing at all when people tried to tell him what he was”; he will not allow anyone to tell him what he was or what to do, for “I’m me and nobody else; and whatever people think I am or say I am, that’s what I’m not” (*SN*, 138).

Seaton often refers to authority – employers, government, anyone trying to control him – as “they” and “them,” symbolizing his simple warlike opposition to anything which he feels is against him. Who “they” are is never clearly defined; it just matters that they are not on the side of Arthur Seaton. It is not the collective “them” against “us” which is the bare definition of class war, but a singular “them” against “me,” for Seaton does not identify himself with his own class or his fellow workers any more than he does with authority. The closest he comes to class identification is with his parents’ hardships before the war, which underlines his own current security. Work relationships are defined in terms of a battle, a fight for individual survival. “So you earned your living in spite of the firm, the rate-checker, the foreman, and the tool-setters, who always seemed to be at each other’s throats except when they ganged-up to get at yours” (*SN*, 32).

Seaton’s anti-authoritarian instincts are based on a fierce yet reflective individualism. His attitude to authority is one of determined opposition which he feels necessary to survive, in order to “stop that bastard government from grinding your face in the muck” (*SN*, 202). The imagery he uses to voice his opposition is constantly violent, associating the government’s attempts to control him with death and his opposition with destruction. There is, however, no real political sentiment behind Seaton’s rage, for he perceives no difference in any of the political parties or ideologies. All of them are out to control him and take away his (financial) freedom:

They shout at you from soapboxes: “Vote for me, and this and that,” but it amounts to the same in the end whatever you vote for because it means a government that puts stamps all over your phizzog until you can’t see a hand before you, and what’s more makes you buy ’em so’s they can keep on doing it. They’ve got you by the guts, by backbone and skull, until they think you’ll come whenever they whistle. (*SN*, 202)

The aggressive individualism replaces collective identity, forged by the experiences of the early 1930s and the Second World War, which had resulted in poverty, death, and the displacement of communities. It reflects a military-based culture in which survival is perceived to be paramount. But Sillitoe goes beyond the social realism of his novel to portray a working-class community bonding over cartoon exploits. He uses conflict to convey the impression of individuals in a community keenly aware of their relationship with each other. But the real conflicts of the cold war and of colonialism are ignored in order not to affect the hedonistic conflict which Arthur Seaton enjoys and which the novel's and the film's audiences embrace. The absence of these conflicts creates the impression of a homogeneous, closed working-class community, like that of *Love on the Dole*, instead of a working-class community affected and conditioned by the nationalized identity of British culture.

#### 4. The Authenticity of Language

The nationalized culture to which Arthur Seaton is tied is reflected in the language that the novel uses. The narrative language and the use of indirect speech make Arthur Seaton conform to a standard form of English, just as Arthur Seaton is forced to conform to standard notions of male working-class identity in marrying Doreen. His dialogue is an outward act of rebellion against this conformity, as it uses regional accent and dialect. But Arthur Seaton's language is conditioned by his experiences in National Service and by his forced adherence to a national popular culture. His language is an aggressive confrontation with the national culture and an attempted affirmation of regional identity. The use of both standard and regional English points to the conflict between regional and national culture that runs through *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, a conflict complicated by regional and class identity.

Arthur Seaton's language, like his lifestyle, is conditioned by Britain's military experiences. The standardization of spoken English was accelerated in the twentieth century as regional cultures were subsumed into a national ideology. This standardization reached its peak with the breaking down of linguistic barriers in the Second World War. Soldiers from different regions and classes spent so much time in close contact that "when the British survey of English dialects was undertaken after the Second World War some difficulty was had in finding non-standard speakers"; National Service continued this process.<sup>350</sup> This wartime linguistic and cultural unification was complemented by the rise of national media and institutions, including trades unions, and increased access to education. Television, radio, and cinema are cultural activities which all the characters of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* enjoy, linking them to a national (and American) culture. This link worked in reverse also. The aim of many cultural, as well as political, institutions was to incorporate and represent the working class in a national culture. After the Second World War, the BBC opened new regional offices which welcomed local writers to send in stories "with more local flavour, including dialect."<sup>351</sup> The use of regional culture and language to form a national culture is similar to the dialect poetry of the nineteenth century. The success of both the novel and film of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* indicates the willingness to absorb working-class literature into a national culture and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning's* playful use of language and identity demonstrates the fluid yet collective nature of British postwar culture.

However, this nationalized culture is complicated by strong affiliations to region, class, and social status. The leisure activities in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* are based on local traditions and the language used is tied to regional variations. Through his language, as much as through his attitude, Arthur Seaton rejects being incorporated into a national

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<sup>350</sup> Michael Gregory and Susanne Carroll, *Language and Situation: Language Varieties and their Social Contexts* (London, Henley, and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 22.

<sup>351</sup> Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents*, 242.

culture. He affirms his identity through region and language, rather than through a politicized class affiliation. His use of language emphasizes his aggressive confidence in his individual identity, which comes from a confidence in a secure regional culture. The language of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* indicates the confidence of a new working-class culture. Unlike Greenwood, Sillitoe does not attempt to translate local terms and the shift from narrative standard English to regional dialogue is more sure than in *Love on the Dole*. In *Love on the Dole*, regional language demonstrates an involuntary detachment from a national identity; in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, it simultaneously demonstrates the absence of, and through regional pride a desire for, that detachment.

However, Sillitoe does not display the artistic confidence that D. H. Lawrence had in both *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow* (nor the political artistry of Hugh MacDiarmid or Lewis Grassie Gibbon). Dialect is limited to words such as “mashed,” “mardy,” or “leary” (*SN*, 62, 185, 195). The blunt flatness of regional accents in the novel emphasizes the aggressive nature and physical directness of male working-class culture: “Hey, mate, watch what yer doin’, can’t yer? Yo’ an’ yer bloody greet clod-’oppers” (*SN*, 13). Regional accents are also used to underline the artistic authenticity of the novel; the more mature and reflective *This Sporting Life* emphasizes the use and sound of regional language far less.

In *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, the use of language is uniform. This emphasizes the social homogeneity of the working-class communities portrayed in the novels. It also underscores the affiliation to regional culture. *Room at the Top* is less subtle in its use of language. Social divisions are clearly marked by the use of language, emphasizing Joe Lampton’s desire to move away from his background and his class. Lampton associates the strong regional accents of his family with poverty, hard work, and unrewarded honesty and Wales’s “carelessly correct” officer’s accent with financial and social success (*RT*, 41). Through language, Braine divides and groups characters socially and indicates Lampton’s uneasy social position. Gregory and Carroll write that,

While users may devalue their own dialect with respect to 'performance' values (personal success, upward mobility, competence, etc.) they may attribute positive 'ethical' values to these same markers (values like honesty, toughness, strength, sincerity, etc.). This differentiation may then contribute to reinforcing group identification and loyalty.<sup>352</sup>

Lampton, especially at the beginning of the novel when he is attempting to break into the town's exclusive circles, is very conscious of the difference between him and the people he wishes to become acquainted with and it is through language that the differences are highlighted. He is mocked at one point for joining the theatrical society, as a character says to him, "T'lad's cum to enjoy hisen, 'aven't you, luv?" (RT, 48), but he too affects an accent in order to comically differentiate himself from those around him and to set up an antagonistic opposition: "Tha doesn't have to coax *me* to sup some ale, lass" (RT, 41).

Attempts at using working-class accents are heavy-handed in the novel. Lampton's working-class family use stereotypically but inconsistently northern language in order to emphasize their class and social immobility. Language here reveals the speaker's class origins and stresses that class is a prewar concept related to poverty, exploitation, and hardship. To jettison a working-class accent is to move away from prewar death and deprivation:

"Ee, I remember her well as a young lass. She used to run the house after Father died. She wor proper determined, wor your mother. Your grandma had all t'heart knocked out of her when your grandpa wor killed at t'mill. During t'first war, that war, and them coining money then, but not a penny-piece of compensation did your grandma get. T'same people went bankrupt in 1930. T'owd meister shot himself." (RT, 89)

The use of language in all three novels, but particularly *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *This Sporting Life*, demonstrates the uneasy interplay between national and regional culture. It reveals the importance of language, and therefore region, to identity. Language, used confidently and aggressively, shows a community more secure in its place in national culture than in the 1930s. But it also emphasizes the importance of authenticity to the novels' artistic and commercial success. The apparent authenticity of

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<sup>352</sup> Gregory and Carroll, *Language and Situation*, 20.

language in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is used to demonstrate the author's familiarity with the region and the people, to confirm the overall authenticity of the community the novel describes, and to emphasize the confidence of 1950s working-class culture. This authenticity is integral to the success of the film versions, which played an important part in establishing the centrality of working-class culture in the 1960s.

## 5. From Novel to Film

Between 1958 and 1963 several commercially successful films were released which heralded a new form of British cinema, termed the British New Wave.<sup>353</sup> Affirming and portraying regional and working-class identity and culture, these films revealed brash working-class masculinity and explored both male and female sexuality. The politics of the films, like the novels, are an aesthetic, rebellious self-assertion rather than socialist propaganda, aggressively moving away from a patrician presentation of working-class culture. They also demonstrate a new sophistication in British cinema. Far removed from the naïve representation of working-class life in *Love on the Dole* or the unquestioning patriotism of British war films, they are technically refined, assertively presented, and stylistically assured. The films' technical sophistication and stylistic presentation of working-class culture solidifies but alters their authenticity. The films use the medium of cinema, through actors, sound, and visuals, to shade the manner of their authentic representation and to shape the audience's views of the working-class communities shown on the screen. Even more so than the novels, through a popular medium the

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<sup>353</sup> The most notable of these films are: *Room at the Top* (Jack Clayton, 1958); *I'm All Right Jack* (Boulting Brothers, 1959); *The Angry Silence* (Guy Green, 1959); *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, 1960); *A Taste of Honey* (Tony Richardson, 1961); *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (Tony Richardson, 1962); *A Kind of Loving* (John Schlesinger, 1962); *This Sporting Life* (Lindsay Anderson, 1963); and *Billy Liar* (John Schlesinger, 1963).

films create a new, influential myth of a self-confident and self-aware working-class culture, able to represent itself artistically, knowingly, and stylishly.

The protracted film adaptation of *Love on the Dole* proved a rare example in the underdeveloped medium of British cinema of an attempt to address working-class poverty seriously. The epigram and epigraph to the film made clear that the extreme poverty of the prewar working class could not be repeated once the war had been won. The documentary movement of the 1930s, led by John Grierson, had also paved the way for a politicized realism. Funded by the British government, these documentaries were “a means of public education and ... an art form.”<sup>354</sup> Part of the aesthetic and political interest in the lives of the working class that dominated 1930s culture, the British documentary movement emphasized the authenticity, or “actuality,” of their medium. However, this authenticity was driven by a politicized desire to represent the working class as hard-working, noble, and deserving. This propagandist element was intensified in the Second World War, when the documentary movement was funded by the newly-created propagandist Ministry of Information. This allowed greater opportunities for filmmakers to practise their art, increased the size of audiences watching their documentaries, and directed the nature of the documentaries towards wartime propaganda, in which the British working class were depicted as heroic and patriotic. This mixture created a dynamic national filmmaking environment, most vividly expressed in the work of Humphrey Jennings. Jennings’s “subtle cross structuring of sound and visual images instilled a uniquely poetic element in his films,” which brought a greater sophistication to British cinema.<sup>355</sup> Such documentaries emphasized the central role of the working class to the development of British cinema, both in their place as audience and subject. Along with the polemical photography of *Picture Post*, the prewar and

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<sup>354</sup> Paul Swann, *The British Documentary Film Movement, 1926-1946* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1.

<sup>355</sup> Swann, *The British Documentary Film Movement*, 162-63.



wartime visualization of the British working class helped add to the myth of a class united by patriotism and decency.

The increased sophistication of British cinema and of British cinema audiences also altered the attitude of the BBFC. After the Second World War a more liberal approach to controversial cinema – with sexual, violent, or political themes – was introduced. Those films which contained scenes of sex and violence were treated more favourably (particularly if they were foreign) and films were judged not just on their content, but on their quality: “Artistic considerations became more important . . . . The quality of the film and the intentions of the director began to count for something.”<sup>356</sup> Censorship was more relaxed, but the content of films was still constrained by the demands of the censors, as is seen in the making of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*.

Although the films of Powell and Pressburger and the Ealing comedies demonstrated technical sophistication and artistic maturity, in the first half of the 1950s most popular British films were gentle comedies or wartime heroics. As the decade progressed, however, British cinema developed the techniques of the documentary movement to become more challenging. Young filmmakers, including Lindsay Anderson, Karel Reisz, and Tony Richardson, began making documentaries under the banner of “Free Cinema,” which were screened on six different occasions at the National Film Theatre.<sup>357</sup> Their aesthetic motivation was similar to that of the documentary movement of the 1930s and 1940s, although the filmmakers were more polemical in attitude. At the first Free Cinema screening (5 February 1956), they announced in the accompanying manifesto:

These films were not made together; nor with the idea of showing them together. But when they came together, we felt they had an attitude in common. Implicit in this attitude is a belief in freedom, in the importance of people and in the significance of the everyday.

*As film-makers we believe that*

*No film can be too personal.*

*The image speaks. Sound amplifies and comments.*

*Size is irrelevant. Perfection is not an aim.*

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<sup>356</sup> Richards, “British Film Censorship,” in Murphy, *The British Cinema Book*, 159.

<sup>357</sup> “Free Cinema: The Definitive Film Collection,”

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/books/video/video/details/freecinema/>, 2 April 2007.

*An attitude means a style. A style means an attitude.*<sup>358</sup>

These documentaries laid the groundwork for the style and content of their future work, a new form of British cinema which rejected patrician representations and embraced experimental change. They signify the artistic polemic behind the New Wave films, to represent the vibrancy of everyday life in a poetically cinematic form. With stylized imagery, they show a working class at work and at leisure, enjoying the pleasurable benefits of 1950s mass entertainment. The style of working-class music and fashion are emphasized to make the feel of the documentaries more radical and to make the English working class which they portray more distant from images of the prewar and Second World War working class.

The portraits of working-class life presented in the film versions of *Room at the Top*, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, and *This Sporting Life* were the culmination of this development in the cinematic portrayal of the British working class. As in the novels, they showed an aggressive, individualist class enjoying life to the full, rather than the honest, hard-working class whose endurance of the drabness of industrial Britain the country could be proud of. This approach emphasized a realistic representation of the lives of the working class in the workplace, at home, and at leisure. This realism was not, however, political but aesthetic. It allowed frank depictions of male and female sexuality; it also allowed experimentation in cinematography, photography, and acting. Sillitoe has commented on how this representation of working-class life, free from socialist or paternalistic ideals, shocked many. For the first time in cinema, the lives of ordinary people were represented artistically, aesthetically, and accurately:

Some people certainly didn't like it. They simply didn't like the fact that ordinary people were shown on the screen in such a way that ordinary people would enjoy looking at themselves. That hadn't really been done before. I think it was attempted in Walter Greenwood's novel *Love on the Dole* ... this was

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<sup>358</sup> "Free Cinema: Original 1956 Programme,"

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/freecinema/programme/prog2.html>, 2 April 2007.

then taken a stage or two beyond that, towards reality. Probably not finally reality, but it was getting there.<sup>359</sup>

*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* was the third most successful film of 1961 in Britain and this was the film which presented the lives of working-class youths most aggressively and stylistically, with the clearest and brashest rejection of prewar drabness.<sup>360</sup>

*Room at the Top*, directed by Jack Clayton, who had made RAF documentaries during the war, appealed most to the mainstream, starring established actor Laurence Harvey. In its desire for scandal the film has dated, but nevertheless it marked a significant change from British cinema before it. Like *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, it was photographed by Freddie Francis, “one of the greatest of all cinematographers,” whose film noirish lighting in both films gives the industrial towns a glamour and its characters a sophistication absent from previous portraits of the working class.<sup>361</sup> *Room at the Top* shows an extramarital affair without condemnation and is non-judgmental of the characters’ greed, ambition, and self-interest. Marwick suggests that these aspects, due in part to the nature of the medium, are presented less subtly than in the novel, accounting for the film’s success: “the direct, predatory Joe Lampton of the film spoke more truly to British audiences than any attempted reincarnation of the introspective, self-examining Joe Lampton of the novel.”<sup>362</sup> This is to overemphasize the introspection of the novel’s Lampton. Joe Lampton’s appeal lies more in the casting of the good-looking, well-spoken, and popular Laurence Harvey. The casting of Simone Signoret, who plays Alice with an edgy world-weariness, also alters the nature of their relationship. It gives an air of French sophistication and allure; it also distances the character from the northern English environment. The joint casting takes away a level of authenticity, concentrating

<sup>359</sup> DVD commentary on Reisz, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, 1:17:38-1.18.08.

<sup>360</sup> Harper and Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s*, 249.

<sup>361</sup> *The Encyclopedia of British Film*, ed. Brian McFarlane (London: Methuen/BFI, 2003), 234.

<sup>362</sup> Marwick, “The ‘Cultural Revolution’ in Britain,” in *Contemporary History* 19:1, 135.

the film's focus on the drama of a doomed love affair. It is this focus which links *Room at the Top* to the dramas of 1940s cinema, but with an added sexual maturity.

The film also alters the novel's focus in determining to capture the mood of affluence felt at the end of the 1950s: the film's "chronology is not made terribly clear, [but] the sets and costumes are those of the fifties."<sup>363</sup> The film still shows an industrial Britain recovering from the Second World War, in the bombed-out houses and in individual experiences, but the contrast in the novel between prewar deprivation and postwar affluence is emphasized by the near-contemporary scenes of affluence. The only time poverty is apparent in the film, apart from Lampton's earnest, self-justifying declarations of past hardships, is when he visits his bombed-out family home, which is surrounded by poverty and distrust. Hutchings writes that in the film "panoramic shots of the industrial city ... are of little significance here, and the New Wave's concern with the depredations of modern mass culture is entirely absent."<sup>364</sup> The backdrop of industrial Warley does, however, provide a visual accompaniment to Lampton's class confusion. Moreover, in portraying a working-class environment unpatronizingly or without focusing on heroic class warriors the film differs greatly from 1940s British cinema and ties it to the cultural sentiments of the late 1950s. As Marwick points out, "the film is located in real historical time, and its insistent message is that the older conventions are cracking and that a hitherto neglected section of British life is thrusting into visibility."<sup>365</sup> The success of *Room at the Top* indicated the commercial possibilities of depicting contemporary affluence and social ambition. This success impressed both financial investors and the moral censors, for "the popular reaction" to *Room at the Top* "persuaded [Trevelyan] to grant an X certificate to responsible films on serious adult subjects."<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> Marwick, "The 'Cultural Revolution' in Britain," in *Contemporary History* 19:1, 134.

<sup>364</sup> Peter Hutchings, "Beyond New Wave: Realism in British Cinema, 1959-63," in Robert Murphy ed., *The British Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 2001), 147.

<sup>365</sup> Marwick, "The 'Cultural Revolution' in Britain," in *Contemporary History* 19:1, 135.

<sup>366</sup> Richards, "British Film Censorship," in Murphy, *The British Cinema Book*, 160.

*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, directed by Karel Reisz, is much more experimental in form and unflinchingly aggressive in its presentation of working-class masculinity. Following on from the Free Cinema naturalist documentaries, Reisz uses contemporary music to create an image of a vibrant, youthful working class which has its own independent culture. Hutchings writes that in films such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, “The focus was on the working class, but this was not the working class as envisaged by Grierson’s documentaries – noble workers, worthy cogs in the social machine.”<sup>367</sup> However, this difference is conditioned by the demands of the censors. Their forced changes result in quite a different focus. Through its violence, aggression, and unfocused anger, the community of the novel is one set apart from the unifying patriotism of the 1940s, instead concerned in protecting its own interests. This focus was changed in the film: “The violence and villainy are played down, so that essentially we are in the realm of the respectable working class.”<sup>368</sup> These forced changes alter the authenticity of the film, making it comply to official versions of working-class sensibility. They echo the shift in *Love on the Dole* from socialist-inspired self-representation to wartime propaganda, demonstrating that the authentic presentation of working-class life is forged both by artistic interpretations, commercial expectations, and the demands of authority.

One example of a forced change is that Brenda’s illegal abortion becomes unsuccessful in the film. Audrey Field, who read the script for the BBFC, wrote that, “I have strong misgivings about the slap-happy and successful termination of pregnancy which seems to be very dangerous stuff for our younger X-cert customers.”<sup>369</sup> The unsuccessful abortion changes the nature of Seaton’s relationship with Brenda quite significantly. But commercial expectations also change the relationship: the glamorous, attractive Doreen,

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<sup>367</sup> Hutchings, “Beyond New Wave,” 146.

<sup>368</sup> Marwick, “The ‘Cultural Revolution’ in Britain,” in *Contemporary History* 19:1, 144.

<sup>369</sup> On DVD commentary, Reisz, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, at 42:41-42:52.

played by Shirley Anne Field, appears far earlier and more prominently in the film than in the novel. In order to emphasize the youthful sophistication of the working-class characters, Brenda is sidelined to allow the focus to fall on the self-assured younger woman. This alters the novel's authenticity to create an authenticity suitable for a medium popular with the young working class.

Free from political associations, films such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* presented non-metropolitan working-class life without the aim of changing or defending it. The authenticity of the films is not adapted for political purposes. But, as is shown in the casting for *Room at the Top*, the choice of actors shapes that authenticity. The assumption of an actor's authenticity of performance – through accent, manner, and biographical background – is integral to convincing an audience of the film's overall authenticity. In *Room at the Top*, Joe Lampton was played by Lithuanian-born and South African-educated Laurence Harvey. In *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Arthur Seaton is played by Albert Finney, born in Manchester and his delivery and performance gives a further layer of authenticity to the film's representation of working-class life.

*This Sporting Life* was made in 1963, five years after the advent of British New Wave cinema. It demonstrates the advance of British cinema in its sophisticated presentation of working-class culture. In its stylized and naturalistic depiction of rugby league and working-class masculinity and sexuality, it is the natural conclusion to five years of technical experimentation and artistic focus on working-class culture. It rejects the brash appeal of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* for a more nuanced analysis of that culture. But it was made at a moment when that cinematic sophistication was replaced by the international success of British popular and working-class culture. The Beatles's image, especially as shown in *A Hard Day's Night*, is more influenced by the loud, witty masculinity of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* than the masculinity complicated by class and work relations as presented in *This Sporting Life*.

In the novels and films, it is this artistic, class, and linguistic regionalism, indicating class pride and confidence, which predates and predicts the cultural change of the 1960s. Regional accents went from being unheard – apart from as comedy voices – and lives unrepresented to the popularity and ubiquity of the 1960s. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* was released just a few months after the first showing of *Coronation Street*, the first years of which aimed to represent the working class in a realistic, down-to-earth manner. In the soap opera, the lives, cultures, and fashions of the industrial working class were shown weekly to mass audiences, at the same time that they were being viewed in the cinema. This became one of the dominant themes of the 1960s, most apparent in the huge success of the Beatles, who, amongst other things, made regional accents fashionable. Sitcoms which followed, such as *The Likely Lads* and *Steptoe and Son*, were confident expressions of a changing working-class culture, which recorded, preserved, and maintained public representations of working-class life, which Richard Hoggart had feared in *The Uses of Literacy* were dying out. The success of both the novel and the film of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* paved the way for this cultural implosion.

## CONCLUSION

D. H. Lawrence, Walter Greenwood, and Alan Sillitoe grapple with the problem in working-class fiction which Raymond Williams, amongst others, has described: “[the working-class novel] depicts a very interesting, vigorous and autonomous community . . . . Yet curiously the very stress of this autonomy often denies the essential problem of what working-class fiction should be about – the lived experience of the immediate producers within a class society, and therefore specifically in relation to other classes.”<sup>370</sup> As Williams points out, much of the proletarian literature of the 1930s fails, or is only partially successful, because the authors describe their community authentically and realistically, yet without defining the influence of a national culture on that community. This limitation makes the novel of historical, but not of literary, interest.

The progress of the working-class novel in the twentieth century is towards the powerful combination of local realism and national culture that Williams sought. This progress was started by Lawrence in his early short stories and, most successfully, in *Sons and Lovers*. He uses the realist form established by nineteenth-century writers to portray his community authentically and vigorously, but he also uses his position within that community to make that realism more personalized. In *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence is fully conscious of the external forces, such as labour politics, education, and suffragism, which shape his community and his position within it. His confident appraisal of his

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<sup>370</sup> Williams, *Politics and Letters*, 267.



community enables him to focus primarily on individual experience and the struggle to forge an individual personality under the pressure of those external forces. Lawrence achieves “the indissoluble unity of individual and social experience,” whilst, by discussing the social conflicts of his working-class community through the personal conflicts of his own intellectual development, he “explain[s] ... those acts and responses which are not ... prepared by social circumstances or relations as we can ordinarily assess them.”<sup>371</sup> Lawrence confuses and complicates the concept of individual experience in an industrial community by describing the many ambiguities in class relations in that community rather than by emphasizing the stability of its construct in socialist terms.

Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole* succeeds where other working-class novels failed, for it rejects the pressures placed on working-class writers of the 1930s to represent their class through a socialist ideology. Partially conforming to socialist prescripts but also complying with metropolitan ideals, Greenwood is alert to the expectations of his readership and adapts the authenticity of his presentation accordingly. He makes clear the effects of the external forces on his community and the individuals within it, whilst at the same time focusing on the complex formation of a working-class community. He cleverly mixes actual authenticity, adapted authenticity, and fiction to create a powerful, culturally and politically successful account of working-class life in the early 1930s.

It is this successful mixture which enables English working-class culture to be a defining ideological hold on the Second World War and leads to the confident cultural assertions of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. Sillitoe is able to present his community realistically and to demonstrate the nature of the external forces which shape it. But, free from political expectations, Sillitoe is in fact able to present some of the worst aspects of working-class life without fear of political or cultural censure. Doing so gives working-class culture a popular allure, which is captured in the film adaptation.

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<sup>371</sup> Williams, *Politics and Letters*, 252.

John Kirk has recently described the influence of D. H. Lawrence on twentieth-century English working-class fiction. In Kirk's account, Lawrence instigated the anti-industrial tradition in working-class fiction, with the relationship between the working class and the English countryside of greater significance than its part in the international industrial process. The association of the working class with the English countryside "gives an established sense of permanence out of which developed forms of identity and culture," stabilizing their place in an unstable industrial national English culture.<sup>372</sup> As this thesis has described, the nature of Lawrence's and other working-class writers' anti-industrialism is more complicated than Kirk allows: "Industrial society, for Lawrence, is simply overwhelmingly determining and causal."<sup>373</sup> Rather, industrial society, for Lawrence, is fluid and adaptable, an integral and inevitable part of individual experience. Lawrence's emphasis on masculine individual experience in the industrial-rural space replaces the socialist focus on collective class action. It differs from socialist realism in that rather than revealing social truths and inequalities, it draws local working-class tradition into a national culture in ways which complicate both metropolitan and socialist versions of the English working class.

It is this narrative of a working-class tradition of literature which this thesis has traced. This tradition is inherited from the realist English fiction and the regional musical and literary culture of the industrial nineteenth century. It draws on those traditions to create a new, deliberately unstable tradition, which has both to appeal to and reject socialist, metropolitan, and local expectations. This tradition foregrounds local culture, emphasizes the importance of individual experience, and represents communities attempting to assert themselves in an increasingly dominant national culture. The depiction of the English, and more generally the British, working class in the Second World War through newspaper and cinema emphasizes within this newly established tradition the decency

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<sup>372</sup> Kirk, "Figuring the Landscape," in *Literature & History* 15:1, 5.

<sup>373</sup> Kirk, "Figuring the Landscape," in *Literature & History* 15:1, 1.

and literacy of the working class. After the Second World War, however, the tradition is once again adapted to reject metropolitan attitudes to create a working-class culture which is vibrantly contemporary. Working-class fiction follows but constantly modifies Lawrence's tradition. The fiction is adapted to local, national, and international political developments and cultural forms, to changing versions of English and British identity and the working class. It also maintains, as *Sons and Lovers* had, a cautious acceptance of the role of industry in working-class culture. Twentieth-century English working-class fiction is an aggressive challenge to embrace the conflicting rural, local, and industrial traditions which shape working-class communities.

## AFTERWORD

### On *Border Country* by Raymond Williams

In 1986, nearly forty years after he first started writing *Border Country* (1960), Raymond Williams commented on realizing at the time one of the prime difficulties of writing fiction: “form, literary form, is determined by a particular social, ideological set of expectations.”<sup>374</sup> *Border Country* is a novel which attempts to alter the historical, political, and literary expectations of both realism and working-class fiction, by exploring the possibility “of seeing whether the realist form is capable of extension and transformation” and by providing a sense of continuity to descriptions of working-class communities which he felt had been lacking in working-class fiction – which, in Williams’s opinion, had been overly indebted to the early work of D. H. Lawrence.<sup>375</sup> In later interviews, Williams was open about the contradictions that resulted from trying, in his first published novel, to use and alter the traditions of two different forms of writing: “I found that what I was writing was an experience of uncertainty and contradiction, which was duplicated in the problem of discovering a form for it.”<sup>376</sup> Indeed, Williams is quite self-conscious within *Border Country* itself about the dilemmas he, as the novelist, faces. In describing his research into Welsh population movements, Matthew Price tells Morgan Rosser of the difficulties he is confronting: “I wanted, like a fool, to write the

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<sup>374</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. Tony Pinkney (London and New York: Verso, 1989), 186. Williams’s comments were part of a conversation with Edward Said.

<sup>375</sup> Williams, *Politics and Letters*, 276 and 272.

<sup>376</sup> Williams, *Politics and Letters*, 272.

history of a whole people being changed. I'm an ... academic historian. ... I saw suddenly that it wasn't a piece of research, but an emotional pattern. Emotional patterns are all very well, but they're our own business. History is public or nothing."<sup>377</sup> As Price indicates, the divide between public and private is, within *Border Country*, historical and emotional; it is also political and personal. But *Border Country* does something different from Price's own research: it strives to understand how to span the border between the public and private, to bring the political and the personal together in an historical and emotional understanding of the past and of place.

*Border Country* was published three years after *Room at the Top* and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and in the same year as *This Sporting Life*. Like those novels, it is concerned with working-class identity, community, and place, but Williams makes history and politics – the individual's and the community's place in historical and political processes – of central concern. In *Room at the Top*, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, and *This Sporting Life*, the Second World War is a key recent moment present in the memory of both the adults and the young generation; *Border Country* goes further back, to the General Strike of 1926. The past – of individual memory and of collective political history – dominates the novel structurally and thematically. This past is used by Williams to explain how he feels that the individual, the community, and the larger society are shaped by one another. Thus, *Border Country* is quite different from *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, in which individual consciousness and action are defined *against* rather than within collective action; in which history has been experienced but disregarded; and in which political attitudes are confused, ill-defined, and loosely rejected.

*Border Country* also differs from those English novels of the late 1950s in its location. Rather than being set in an urban community, the countryside around which provides an idyllic means of temporary escape from the industrial workplace, *Border Country* is set in

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<sup>377</sup> Raymond Williams, *Border Country* (Cardigan: Parthian/The Library of Wales, 2006 [1960]), 353. Henceforth abbreviated BC.

Glynmawr, a small rural village located near the English-Welsh border.<sup>378</sup> This literal, geographical border country points to the importance, but also the ambiguity, of place. The size of Glynmawr makes the familiarity between its inhabitants, but also with its surrounding countryside, unavoidable. Place is defined locally – through its geography and industry – but it is also connected to the national. In *Border Country*, place is not simply a community connected through work, religion, and family, but also an historical and geographical landscape which has shaped and defined a community as much as its industries. The problem for individuals in the novel is how to define or place themselves in a community where the borders are so clearly designated yet are constantly being stretched.

This tension between individual and place is central to *Border Country*. The novel views how the individual is tied to place and how the individual attempts to break those ties. At one point, Matthew Price contemplates the power of place as he looks towards England from Wales and then back towards Wales again, reflecting that, “In its history the country took on a different shape” (*BC*, 364). As Price sits looking at the countryside around him, he feels the importance of the connections between the local, the regional, and the national. These connections are historical and geographical, not just economic: “Now it was not just the valley and the village, but the meeting of valleys, and England blue in the distance” (*BC*, 364). David Harvey writes that Williams “wants always to emphasize the ways in which personal and particular choices made under given conditions are the very essence of historical-geographical change.”<sup>379</sup> This emphasis demonstrates the paradox that leads to much of the tension within *Border Country*: the choice of the individual to take independent decisions – to support and involve oneself

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<sup>378</sup> Williams was born in Llanvihangel Crucorney, near Pandy and Abergavenny, and near the English-Welsh border, and near, as is indicated towards the end of the novel, what is now the A465 (the main road from Hereford to Swansea).

<sup>379</sup> David Harvey, “Militant Particularism and Global Ambition: The Conceptual Politics of Place, Space, and Environment in the Work of Raymond Williams,” in *Social Text* 42 (Spring 1995), 79.

in the General Strike, to set up a business, or to go to an English university – and the power of place to limit, condition, or even force those decisions through history, community, and tradition.

The tension of living in a border country signifies the tension between the individual and the community, the industrial and the rural, and the modern and the old. Glynmavr – its locality, its culture, its economy – represents the pull between the old and the new, the past and the present, “the seemingly unresolvable tension between individuals who inhabit marginal border places ... and the abstractions of social and historical change.”<sup>380</sup>

There are three key characters who embody this tension. Harry Price is a railway signalman, working at a job which is part of a modern industry that connects the local to the regional and then to the national. Morgan Rosser, on his part, rejects old-fashioned traditional industry to become a mini-capitalist, but he does not reject where he comes from to do this: he builds his business by selling local produce. He realizes the modern, commercial, capitalist potential of the land, of how the local is connected to larger social and economic forces. Rosser represents, indeed is directly indicative of, how “the valley where Matthew grew up is becoming increasingly integrated into the British economy.”<sup>381</sup> Finally, Matthew Price, in attending Cambridge, is part of another social change, of social mobility through education. This social mobility does not so much complete his father’s development, which explains why the tension in their relationship is so difficult to resolve; rather, it comes closer to completing the economic development of Morgan Rosser, who has brought national industry into the life of the village. But both Harry and Matthew Price refuse to take part in Rosser’s project: Matthew moves to the national, rather than bringing it to the village. Furthermore, Matthew’s research is into precisely what he is an integral part of: population movement.

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<sup>380</sup> Timothy Oakes, “Place and the Paradox of Modernity,” in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87:3 (September 1997), 517.

<sup>381</sup> Oakes, “Place and the Paradox of Modernity,” in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87:3, 518.

These complex relationships between the local and the national, revealed through the equally complex relationships between individuals and their work and community, differ from previous working-class fiction: “What is important for Williams, then, is that the landscapes of Wales be represented not as enclosed places being corrupted from without ... but as on-going historical processes of both local and broader social relations.”<sup>382</sup> This is a rejection of – or a difference from – much of working-class fiction which blames, or at least holds responsible, larger social and economic (capitalist) forces for the collapse of local communities, traditions, and economies. Williams sees the actions of the inhabitants of Glynmawr as indicative of, rather than inflicted by, those forces. Moreover, their actions are not only pushed by those national economic forces, but also by the dynamics of their own community and individual relationships. However, although Williams changes the dynamics of the relationship between the local and the national by giving equal weight to the development of each, this does still follow previous working-class fiction. In *Border Country*, as in *Sons and Lovers*, *Love on the Dole*, and *Saturday Night Sunday Morning*, the relationship between the local, regional, and national through industry and politics is central to understanding the personal relationships that define the private voice of a community. Glynmawr, despite its local vitality, is subject, through both unions and business, to national politics: “political consciousness in a rural Welsh village community, traversed by a railway line along which goods and information flow, gets transformed by virtue of its relation to the miners’ strike in South Wales, only in the end to be sold out by decisions taken in London.”<sup>383</sup>

After contemplating the power of place, Matthew Price reflects that the difficulty of leaving Glynmawr for a new place is to establish a new voice; and, likewise, the difficulty of returning to that place is finding that voice again: “Aye, to your voice, but to which

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<sup>382</sup> Oakes, “Place and the Paradox of Modernity,” in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87:3, 519.

<sup>383</sup> Harvey, “Militant Particularism,” in *Social Text* 42, 80.



voice? The voice on the mountain, waiting to be learned. The voice here, querulous: not the persuasive rhythm, but the unfinished truculence” (BC, 368). Price is here echoing his own thoughts on first hearing Dr Evans’s voice: “A Welsh voice, but very different from the Glynmawr accent: smoother with narrower vowels, and with the intonation of the mining valleys – persuasive in every rhythm, ingratiating even, whereas here the rhythm is an unfinished truculence – you’re not going to believe what I say” (BC, 177-78). The indicated differences in voice again demonstrate the importance *Border Country* gives to place in the formation and the limitations of character, and Price’s question – “which voice?” – points to the dilemma raised by being attached to, or by trying to detach oneself from, a particular place. But Price’s question also points to the significance of language in understanding Williams’s intentions in the novel. The constraints of language which Williams imposes on the novel echo the constraints which community and place impose on the novel’s characters. Characters in the novel, however, do escape, or stretch, the constraints of place – Morgan Rosser in his small business which he sells to a national corporation, Matthew Price going to Cambridge and lecturing in London – but they do not escape the constraints of that imposed language. It is this combination of escape and entrapment which summarizes the tension within *Border Country*.

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The differences between *Border Country* and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* are made all the more apparent by the stylistic contrast. The style of *Border Country* is key to understanding its thematic concerns: an austere starkness dominates. This austerity makes it different from all the novels studied in this thesis, not just those published at the end of the 1950s. The novel’s stylistic austerity has been viewed, by Williams himself among others, as a rejection of a recognizably verbose style of Welsh writing, what Williams called “an extreme verbal exuberance,” established through 1930s authors such

as Jack Jones, Gwyn Jones, and Lewis Jones, and, slightly later, Dylan Thomas.<sup>384</sup>

Williams admired all of these writers, but, according to Dai Smith, he wished to write differently:

By the 1950s there was a readily identifiable Welsh model [of fiction]. Raymond Williams wrote and re-wrote *Border Country*, from 1947 to 1958, in conscious rejection of this type-casting. His spare, descriptive prose and restrained, careful dialogue was a deliberate decision to avoid the rhetorical excess then seen as marking out an 'Anglo-Welsh' school.<sup>385</sup>

Williams, through this rejection of a kind of protective exoticism, is attempting to write a very different Welsh novel, locating a Welsh community within the broader context of British national history. To view *Border Country* solely within that Anglo-Welsh context is too limiting, however, for *Border Country* also distances itself from twentieth-century English working-class fiction; to compare it with the language of *Sons and Lovers* or *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, for example, emphasizes further the novel's spare restraint. This linguistic restraint also points to the novel's sexual restraint. Unlike *Sons and Lovers* or *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, the politics of class and community are not echoed in the politics of sexuality but in the politics of the General Strike and of language.

The narrative voice is similar to the voice of Morgan Rosser as Matthew Price hears it, a voice which throughout the novel helps explain but also questions the actions and thoughts of, and relationship between, Harry and Matthew Price: "The voice was steady, unforced and unemotional. Matthew listened for every shade of motive, but could find none. For a moment, unwarily, he felt safe" (*BC*, 354). There have been conflicting debates on the success of Williams's style in *Border Country*. Tony Pinkney has been most critical:

Most writers on *Border Country* have registered the extraordinary metaphorical austerity of the book's prose .... At its best, the style recreates the experience and rhythm of work in the community itself,

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<sup>384</sup> Williams, *Politics and Letters*, 279.

<sup>385</sup> Dai Smith, "Relating to Wales" in *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Terry Eagleton (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 42.

dogged, sparing, tight-lipped and dry-eyed .... Yet this same purged style ultimately, in its systematic exclusions, entails other and less desirable commitments: close to the community in one sense, it marginalizes or even abolishes it in another. ... But to do so [to avoid the exuberant Welsh style] was to enact the founding gesture of the realist novel itself, which first moves into the local community, since it is there that it will effect its social-democratic extension of 'sympathy', but then radically steps out of it, in its construction of the universal, disinterested, linguistically transparent Reason of its own narrative level. To renounce metaphor or the signifier is no innocent, local gesture .... To abolish metaphor is then, within realism, to marginalize desire, sexuality, fantasy, utopian imagination ....<sup>386</sup>

Pinkney is viewing Williams within a modernist context and contrasts Williams's stylistic reticence with the playfulness of Joyce (another writer Williams admired).<sup>387</sup> But, in a sense, Williams's austerity *is* modernist: he matches style with content, form with feel, mode with purpose. John Eldridge and Lizzie Eldridge oppose Pinkney's reading, contending that the difficulty of communication is central to the novel, that the constraint of the novel's language echoes the forced restraint of the language of its characters:

This distinction between life as it is lived and life as 'talked about' is again related to the problematic nature of communication, which, in Williams' fiction, is expressed as the disconnection of the feeling from the word. Feeling as thought is an image central to his characterization. His characters' speech patterns frequently imply their struggle to articulate emotion.<sup>388</sup>

Both sets of critics are in effect saying the same thing: that Williams deliberately ensures that the style and language of the novel reflect the situation and language of its characters. But this view is twisted slightly by David Harvey, who sees the characters caught between different modes of living and therefore speaking:

This tension between the different levels and kinds of abstractions to which individuals necessarily appeal in order to understand their relation to the world is particularly vivid in his novels, often internalized within the conflicting emotions of the protagonists. ... Caught in that duality it becomes almost impossible to find a language with which to speak.<sup>389</sup>

The language of *Border Country*, then, becomes of central importance to the themes and the success of the novel. But this tension that Harvey identifies is not simply a tension

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<sup>386</sup> Tony Pinkney, "Raymond Williams and the 'Two Faces of Modernism'" in Eagleton, *Critical Perspectives*, 25-26.

<sup>387</sup> See Williams, *Politics and Letters*, 278, for Williams's comments on Joyce's style and also 279 for comments on Welsh writing.

<sup>388</sup> John Eldridge and Lizzie Eldridge, *Raymond Williams: Making Connections* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 146.

<sup>389</sup> Harvey, "Militant Particularism," in *Social Text* 42, 84.

within the novel between different modes of living and of expression. It is also a tension present in the very writing of the novel, for Williams is challenging modes of writing – realism and working-class fiction – which are inherently problematic, each laden with its own cultural and theoretical baggage. Williams challenges these two forms through a forced linguistic restraint, which he imposes on both narrative and dialogue. The novel’s restraint can thus be seen as reflecting the restraint of the characters; as an expression of the tension between the voluntary restraint and the involuntary limitations that shape the characters’ lives; or as limiting the actions and development of the characters.

The narrative voice of *Border Country* is a deliberately austere attempt to give the facts without interfering with the telling of those facts. In *Border Country*, Williams records contemporary, late-1950s Welsh society from the point of view of Matthew Price, a returning absentee, freshly observant of his half-familiar environment. Williams switches within the narrative back to the 1920s, recording the events of the 1926 General Strike and its effects on the local community and its resident families. By switching between the contemporary and pre-contemporary, Williams emphasizes the importance of historical narrative to his realist technique. He later contrasted the realism of *Border Country* with nineteenth-century realism, seeing a contradiction in the limitations of the latter with the limitations that 1950s publishing allowed him: “The conditions of movement between different worlds are much more complex than in the large-scale realist novels of the past century, while the space for realizing them has conversely diminished.”<sup>390</sup> Williams saw the forced omission of a “grand historical narrative” as limiting his ability to give a thorough historical backdrop to the novel’s characters and community. However, given the exhaustive treatment of the history and development of the characters and community of *Border Country*, it is actually Williams’s use of language that limits the success of the novel.

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<sup>390</sup> Williams, *Politics and Letters*, 275.

Williams saw modernism as a “reminder how deeply constituted, socially, language always is, even when the decision has been made to abandon its identifiable semantic freight.”<sup>391</sup> Writing after the intense lyricism of Lawrence and the linguistic exuberance of the Anglo-Welsh writers, Williams is fully aware of the effect language has, of the place and use of language within the representation of the community. In contrast to the aggressive exuberance of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* which signals a newly-discovered working-class confidence, the spare, restrained tone of *Border Country* emphasizes instead the maturity of a working-class consciousness which has a history on which to reflect and draw. Williams later commented, in relation to the Welsh writers who had come before him, that “he was determined to avoid ... a form of cultural subordination” that was apparent in the “way the Welsh [presented] themselves to a London audience.”<sup>392</sup> Instead, he wished to write with “the rhythms of certain kinds of ordinary Welsh speech.”<sup>393</sup> *Border Country* thus rejects the playfulness of previous Welsh writing and the aggression of 1950s English writing in order not to be seen as performing for a London audience. The language of *Border Country* is austere, circumspect, and thoughtful; like the conversation of the novel’s characters, *Border Country* meditates on past and present in deliberate, almost ponderous, terms. But refusing to attract a London audience through a rhetorical exuberance stultifies the language of the characters, and takes away the individuality of each character’s voice. The following passage demonstrates the awkward ordinariness of both the narrative prose and the dialogue. The conversation is bland, indicating the tension between the everyday activity of the workplace and the potentially extraordinary activity of the upcoming strike. But the tone is so neutral, Williams gives the speech so little emphasis or personality, that the

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<sup>391</sup> Williams, *On Modernism*, 69.

<sup>392</sup> Williams, *Politics and Letters*, 279.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*

supposed “truculence” of the language is absent, and it is hard to actually *feel* the tension, or to hear the rhythm of the community’s voice.

“All clear then,” Harry heard Morgan call down, while he was wheeling his bike along the dusty ramp, beside the lower rods of the signal levers.

“Clear enough,” Rees said, lighting his pipe.

“Only you notice what it says about agreement with your union,” Morgan called. “That means you’ll be with us, I suppose.”

Rees drew carefully on his pipe. “We’ll have to see about that,” he said.

Harry came out, and took off his clips.

“Nice day, Harry,” Rees greeted him.

“Aye. Only a bit too warm for what I been doing.”

“What’s that?”

“Digging.” (BC, 108)

Its narrative austerity is, potentially, a politicized rejection of the “slightly degraded” Anglo-Welsh fiction written for a non-local audience; however, it can also be seen as a representation of a working-class community which takes away that community’s voice. In *Border Country* there is a formal integration of style and character, form and incident; there is no imbalance in presentation of language and incident. But limiting the range of language and metaphor of the novel complicates this relationship between language and incident. This makes the novel, and its representation of a working-class community, more uneven and imbalanced than initially seems.

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As I mentioned in the chapter on D. H. Lawrence, Williams admired George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and Lawrence for “the inclusion in their novels of people hitherto unwritten about.”<sup>394</sup> Of greatest interest to Williams in these authors’ portrayal of “the new and critical experience of craftsmen, artisans, labourers, miners” is how, through language, they were to be portrayed: “the problem in this – and it is a continuing problem – is the relation between the language of the novelist – always in some measure an educated language, as it has to be if the full account is to be given, and the language of these newly described men and women – a familiar language, steeped in place and in

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<sup>394</sup> Williams, *The English Novel*, 171.

work.”<sup>395</sup> Williams goes on to say that what is “really new” in the writing of Lawrence is that, unlike Eliot and Hardy, “the language of the writer is at one with the language of his characters.”<sup>396</sup> Williams stresses that this was because Lawrence was writing where he had lived. This has been one of the cornerstones of the thesis: that Lawrence wrote about where he lived, giving expression to communities that had only previously been described by those from outside, and that in doing so, Lawrence was able to find his own authorial voice – and that in doing so he influenced at least two subsequent generations of working-class writers. Williams’s emphasis on this aspect of Lawrence points us to a key element of *Border Country*, for this novel again is Williams writing about where he came from, exploring his community in order to explore his own intellectual development.

It is the overriding influence of Lawrence on all working-class fiction that Williams was trying to move on from, as much as the Anglo-Welsh writers. In 1986, Williams spoke of how prevalent Lawrence’s influence was on the “wave of working-class novels” that came out in the 1950s and 1960s: “it’s amazing that the majority of them included that form – childhood, adolescence and going away – that Lawrence movement of walking towards the city with all your life ahead of you.”<sup>397</sup> Williams said that he wished to avoid this trope, but found it very difficult to write a novel that was not “pre-formed to end with the person [i.e. a working-class adolescent] leaving a working-class environment.”<sup>398</sup> Williams attempted in *Border Country* to move on from that stereotype:

So what I kept doing was to rewrite it, so that the father was also present in the novel from the beginning, in effect as a young man, although he ages through the novel and the climax is his death. Still, he is there a young man in the same way as the son is a young man, and until that is so, you have not altered the stereotype.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> Williams, *The English Novel*, 173.

<sup>397</sup> Williams, *The Politics of Modernism*, 186.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

Williams had previously expanded yet further on how he wished to develop the form of working-class fiction which had arisen through and after Lawrence. Williams was critical of this form for presenting working-class communities as geographically and socially stable constructs – which presented “the enclosed class a regional zone of experience.”<sup>400</sup>

Williams instead wished to “find a fictional form which would allow the description both of the internally seen working-class community and of a movement of people, still feeling their family and political connections, out of it.”<sup>401</sup> He achieves this change in form and emphasis by switching between the two narratives – of Harry Price the young man during the Strike and of Harry Price the dying man looked after by his returning son. The questions, however, of belonging and of the relationship between a working-class adolescent and his parents which dominate *Sons and Lovers* are still central to *Border Country*.

Despite praising Lawrence for writing in the voice of his community, Williams chooses in *Border Country* to write in a detached, spare tone. Dialogue is also made to conform to the sparse narrative tone. This was of key concern to Williams: “I was very aware of the problem of the distance between the language of narrative and analysis and any language of speech which is other than the most tidied up standard English. I didn’t want there to be a contradiction between the two in the novel.”<sup>402</sup> Certainly, Williams is more successful than Greenwood or Sillitoe in presenting a uniform voice throughout the novel. But this does not mean he resolves the problem. In fact, his solution results in the same problem as *Love on the Dole*, but from the opposite direction: in *Love on the Dole*, the working-class characters lose their voice in the standard English narrative, in *Border Country*, it is lost in the dialogue. So confined are the characters by the stark language that spontaneous expression becomes impossible; instead, dialogue is part of the general

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<sup>400</sup> Williams, *Politics and Letters*, 272.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Williams, *Politics and Letters*, 279.



thematic development of the novel, a means of debating the novel's issues, acting out a confusion rather than demonstrating it. The simplicity of the words used in dialogue become "a screen behind which some more complicated process [is] engaging" the characters (*BC*, 179). Williams explains through the novel those complicated processes, but the dialogue lacks the flow of confusion – the "unfinished truculence" – of everyday speech. The following conversation between Morgan Rosser and Matthew/Will Price is moving and affecting, in that it demonstrates the son's loyalty and love towards his father. It also demonstrates the characters' difficulty in expressing outright what they think to the person that matters. But the dialogue is so laden down with intent, thought, double meaning, that the rhythm of the Welsh voice is lost.

"Look, Will, I said be straight. You must be thinking it. I'm thinking it myself. Why do you think I come out here? It's not just to ask about him, or see you. I come because my life is in question. That's what this is."

"Is it? It seems so for me. All my life I've had one centre, one thing I was sure of: that his life was good. And I suppose I'd believed that the good is somehow preserved. Until now."

"He'd be glad to hear you say that, Will."

"He knows it. He knows what I think of him."

"None of us really know, Will. What you think of him matters, much more than you know. He'd accept it, really, as a verdict. That's what life is, handing your life on to somebody." (*BC*, 355-56)

*Border Country* is an exploration of a series of tensions manifest in the dichotomy of public and private. That these tensions are not quite resolved reflects the necessary difficulty of bridging the divide between the public and private nature of an individual. But choosing to write *Border Country* in such a uniformly austere style is the only occasion within the novel that Williams tries directly to resolve that tension between the public narrative and the private voice. The failure of the novel's language to do this successfully does, however, point to the ways in which the novel is much happier to embrace these irreconcilable tensions.

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If *Border Country* refuses – or perhaps is not able – to give the inhabitants of a working-class community (especially one which the author is from) a *real*, identifiable,

independent voice in a *realist* novel, then this can lead to a failure of the novel's politics, which are tied up in the General Strike. Pinkney writes that, "For Morgan Rosser, the structure of that defeat [General Strike] is precisely that of the novel itself, an exiling of 'metaphor' or transformative imagination .... In this sense, *Border Country* is in its form and texture complicit with the political collapse it records."<sup>403</sup> Yet *Border Country* has also been read by John Brenkman as an affirmation of the politics of the General Strike – that of a nationwide class and cross-industrial political unity:

The trope that makes the son mirror the father also fashions Williams's own relation to 1926. It links the writer and the story, and in turn links past and present in the shape of a moral commitment to the politics of the General Strike. Williams takes on a responsibility to keep faith with the strikers in his own political-intellectual activities, just as he continually pays homage to family and village. ... Looking past the strike's failures, he instead stresses the political learning processes it unleashed in the consciousness of ordinary workers. From this perspective, what happened in the Welsh village where his father was a railway signalman becomes a typical rather than peripheral event, the key to a continuing heritage rather than an isolated moment lost in the past.<sup>404</sup>

In this defence of Williams's use of the Strike, Brenkman neglects to stress the ambiguity of the Strike in *Border Country*. This ambiguity comes out in the character of Matthew Price and his relationship with his father, in ways which Brenkman only hints at in his analysis above. There is a tangible tension throughout the novel in Matthew Price's affiliation to his community: he lives in London, uses a different name from his family forename (as did Williams), and is a university lecturer researching, significantly, Welsh population movements.<sup>405</sup> He is drawn back to his community to his father's deathbed, not through political or regional adherence. There is a clear pull for Matthew Price to and from Glynmawr, which is demonstrated in the tensions felt not only in his relationship with his father, but also in his relationships with Morgan Rosser and his daughter Eira. This tension is echoed through the narrative of the novel, which presents, in an overlapping, mirrored form, Harry Price as a young man and as a dying man and

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<sup>403</sup> Pinkney, "The Two Faces of Modernism," in Eagleton, *Critical Perspectives*, 26.

<sup>404</sup> John Brenkman, "Raymond Williams and Marxism," in *Cultural Materialism: On Raymond Williams*, ed. Christopher Pendergrast (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 244.

<sup>405</sup> Smith, "Relating to Wales," in Eagleton, *Critical Perspectives*, 38, records Williams's name change (he was known as Jim at home).

Matthew Price as a boy and as an adult. This raises a deliberate narrative confusion: “His [Matthew Price’s] *knowledge* of the events is sharply limited because of his age .... His *moral experience*, on the other hand, is somehow caught up in the crisis of the strike.”<sup>406</sup>

Although deliberate, the narrative confusion is never entirely resolved. Matthew Price’s “knowledge” and “moral experience” are connected in part through his family – learning from the experiences of his father – and also community. But his moral experience, which comes from his father’s political experience, also comes from leaving his community in Wales for England.

This demonstrates the importance of the relationship between the public and the private. Much of Matthew Price’s experience comes from trying to negotiate the border between the two. At times, the public and the private may seem quite separate. Dai Smith identifies two aims of *Border Country*, which point to the tension present in the novel: “Raymond Williams wrote the final version of *Border Country* as a settling of accounts with his father, with himself and with the kind of Wales that had sent him away. ... Williams began to emphasize the necessity of community breakthroughs and local controls in order to face down both centralized and local power structures.”<sup>407</sup> The first aim, a various “settling of accounts,” may seem distinct from the second aim, a fictional expression of his political views on the relationship between the local, regional, and national. However, the two aims are, for Williams, integral to each other. The contrasts and contradictions in these aims – between belonging to a community and being forced away from it; between identifying with but moving away from his father’s political development; between the importance of local power and representation and the primacy of central power (seen through the Strike, industry, and university) – reveal the manner in which the novel is pulled in different directions between the public and the private.

The key to understanding *Border Country* is to understand how Williams views the

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<sup>406</sup> Brenkman, “Raymond Williams and Marxism,” in Pendergast, *Cultural Materialism*, 240-41.

<sup>407</sup> Dai Smith, “On Wales,” in Eagleton, *Critical Perspectives*, 47.

relationship between the public and the private as signifying the relationships between the political and the personal, the historical and the emotional. And thus the characters of *Border Country* are not simply negotiating the border between Wales and England, the rural and the industrial, the old and the modern, but a border between the public and the private in which they must understand their own relationship with their community, their workplace, and their family. In this, *Border Country* fits into the tradition of British working-class fiction more comfortably than Williams himself seems to have felt. The borders between public and private – between community and family, work and home, the weight of history and the emotional experience of living – are present in the other important working-class novels of the twentieth century – from *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow* through *Love on the Dole* and *A Scot's Quair* to *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. It is in the language of *Border Country* that the novel differs most, signalling Williams's intention to write a new form of working-class fiction. Instead, the language actually limits the success of the novel and stifles the tensions within it. It is these tensions which indicate how *Border Country* fits into the complex tradition of British working-class fiction.

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