The Birmingham Group: Reading the Second City in the 1930s

By

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Abstract

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Description:

Described *politically* as propagandistic: the imposition of political dogma on creativity; the literature of a party disguised as the literature of a class and often dismissed *formally* as: conservative; lacking in invention, or simply the naive emulation of bourgeois realism, attempts to define 'Proletarian', or 'Working-Class' fiction and vouchsafe the 'authenticity' of its writers have continually proven resistant to any single or facile definition. This thesis will argue that the narratives of the Birmingham group, rather than constrained by such narrow and negative assessments, present instead as a direct challenge and refutation of them.

Departing from traditional views of working-class writing informed by male-oriented, notions of class-solidarity or contemporary critiques which, during a period of representational experimentation, perfunctorily viewed working-class writing as indebted to the individualistic concerns of bourgeois realism, this thesis will suggest that Birmingham narratives are more accurately characterised by their diversity of innovative and formal approach. Far from politically quiescent they operate in the liminal space between overt propaganda and addressedness to reveal how intersections of class, gender and sexual identity neglected and overlooked owing to the critical legacy of patriarchal and workerist assumptions, were, from the outset not only present *in* their narratives but prescient *of* political and formal issues raised in more recent discussions of working-class writing.

Dedication

The enemy of study is distraction and it is generally agreed that finding space, both temporal and physical, is something of a necessity. I take this opportunity to thank my dear wife Elaine for keeping the hounds at bay and clearing a space for this undertaking. I have been particularly fortunate in this respect, time is indeed a valuable commodity and without her help and attention this project would not have begun, let alone come to fruition.

Acknowledgements

In the first instance I wish to register my appreciation and heartfelt gratitude to Doctor Daniel Moore for supervising this thesis and pointing me towards aspects of the wider critical and theoretical discussion I would not have considered. His encouragement, not to mention patient and diplomatic guidance were invaluable in reining in some of my less-focussed departures and in bringing this project to a conclusion. Thanks are also due to Tony Davies, now retired, who first piqued my interest in the Birmingham group writers, and also to the many others past and present who made my intermittent periods of study at Birmingham University so rewarding. Returning to study following a somewhat extended interval is, to say the least, a challenge, but the enthusiasm of the lecturers and researchers at Birmingham has not only proven contagious but also supportive in providing the much needed momentum to complete this project.

Abbreviations

Throughout this thesis, I have provided the abbreviations shown here in bold italics to locate the Birmingham group novels and short-stories that constitute the primary texts. These refer to the editions shown in the 'List of Works Cited':

Allen, Walter.	*Innocence is Drowned*	***ID***
———,	*Blind Man's Ditch*	***BM***
Brierley, Walter.	*Means Test Man*	***MM***
———,	*Sandwichman*	***SM***
———,	'Transition'	***T***
———,	'Body'	***B***
Chamberlain, Peter.	'Mr. Marris' Reputation'	***MR***
———,	'What The Hell?'	***WH***
———,	'Suburban Exercise'	***SE***
———,	'Belgravian Exercise'	***BE***
Halward, Leslie.	'Belcher's Hod'	***BH***
———,	'Initiation'	***I***
———,	'A Broken Engagement'	***BE***
Hampson, John.	'Man About the House'	***MA***
———,	*Saturday Night at the Greyhound*	***SN***
———,	*O Providence*	***OP***

Archives:

Allen, Walter. Archive and Papers. Cadbury Research Centre. University of Birmingham.
A selection of Allen's novels, poems, criticism and correspondence.
Brierley, Walter. Papers. Derby Local Studies Library. Deposit DL282. A large selection of correspondence between Walter Brierley, Walter Allen and John Hampson. Copies of Brierley's Novels.
Halward, Leslie. Papers. Halward Collection, Birmingham Central Library. MS/1293/106/.
Collection of typescript talks, press cuttings and correspondence, including various playscripts.
Hampson, John. Papers. Special Collections Services. University of Reading. GB6 RUL 5091. Copies of Hampson's published novels.

Contents

Introduction

They at least were not hybrids

My interest in the affiliation of working-class writers known variously as The Birmingham Proletarian Writers, The Birmingham School, or, more commonly The Birmingham Group, was prompted by a brief reference to them during an undergraduate lecture at the University of Birmingham some thirty years ago. The seed of my intention to investigate the work of this unlikely, if not rather incongruous literary coterie who met to discuss their writing in the urban-industrial, manufacturing centre that was 1930s Birmingham, finally germinated in 2016 when the University of Birmingham accepted my research proposal. Armed with assumptions based upon recollections of the nineteenth-century 'Condition of England' novel and such later classics of the working-class canon as Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists,* or Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* and only vague notions as to what a working-class or proletarian literature ought to resemble, my initial encounter with the narratives of the Birmingham group was somewhat perplexing.

Over time critiques of working-class literature produced during the inter-war period have come to regard it as irretrievably 'caught between the jaws of form and content' and, while praising its laudable imperative to promote social change, it was generally considered such principled aims were purchased at the expense of literary expression.[1] *Seemingly* (I use the adverb provisionally) antithetical to modernist experimentation and social realism's commitment to political engagement, one's initial encounter with Birmingham Group narratives is unlikely to move far beyond this view, and in this respect it is not difficult to see how, as a consequence, their narratives have been consigned to critical oblivion. This thesis will provide a close reading and analysis of their novels and short-stories to demonstrate that, although diverging markedly from the work of their contemporaries, the Birmingham group's engagement with the familiar thirties themes of work and unemployment actively challenges contemporary notions of what a working-class text should be.

Neither aesthetically- or philosophically-naïve, as commentators on proletarian literature have charged, the narratives of the Birmingham group exercise restraint by voicing a soft-spoken radicalism and expressive ingenuity which paradoxically reveals them as more powerful means by which to document working-class experience. This thesis will show how their collective achievement was realised in a combination of formal innovation and ideological addressedness not only unique in its time but prescient of recent critical engagements centring on a politics of form. Though dismissed as offering apolitical, at times quietist, representations of the working-

class lives they document, or by failing to urge traditional sectarian concerns, the narratives of the Birmingham group were fully alive to aspects of working-class experience occluded by their more clamant and politically-oriented literary counterparts. Their narratives not only respond to the plight of the working-class by consistently giving voice to those considered peripheral or marginal by contemporary society, but also provide a more holistic picture of working-class culture as it emerges in 'the routine activities of everyday life' chronicled in their narratives.[2]

Beyond their dedicated promotion by Andy Croft some thirty years ago, this is the first extended critical study devoted solely to the narratives of the Birmingham group's constituent members Walter Allen, Leslie Halward, Peter Chamberlain, John Hampson and Walter Brierley.[3] 'Fenced-in' as they were, between two major world conflicts and critical assumptions that viewed their work as merely illustrative of a localised outpouring of social-realism geared to issues of working-class life that were for a brief period fashionable, they have since suffered undue critical neglect. By employing methodologies and theoretical frameworks more sympathetic to the kinds of writing they actually produced, rather than reading their narratives against the prescriptive, frequently 'proscriptive', tenets of contemporary criticism, this study will argue the Birmingham group writers are deserving of far wider critical attention than received hitherto. Functioning as a corrective to an over-zealous approach, this thesis responds to Marina MacKay's and Lyndsey Stonebridge's caution that '[a]ny [work] which professes recuperative intentions risks making inflated claims about the reflected brilliance of the age – no doubt there were plenty of wretched novels produced in this period (as in any other) that have been deservedly forgotten'. [4]

In attempting to answer Andy Croft's question: 'What are we to make today of these writings, this 'Birmingham Group' of writers as different from one another as seems possible?' this thesis will argue that the fictions of the Birmingham group retain an enduring significance as both imaginative literary works and social documents.[5] Their narratives not only address the prevailing themes and issues of the interwar period, but are also responsive, if not 'prefigurative' of trends in the contemporary theorisation and re-evaluation of working-class writing. This response is evident in formal innovations undertaken to adapt and reconfigure traditional representational modes to accommodate subject material overlooked by an emphasis on more politically oriented discussions. As the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies (CCCS) English Studies Group paper 'Thinking the Thirties' makes plain, '[t]he Thirties, in literature and history, is a masculine decade. The politics, narrowly defined class politics from which issues of gender and sexual politics are excluded, are a male preserve', [both manifest in and revealing of] a widespread crisis of masculine identity'.[6] In *Working-Class Writing: Theory and Practice* Nick Hubble and Ben Clarke stress that '[a]ny return to working-class writing must be informed by feminist,

post-colonial and queer studies, exploring *the intersections of class with gender, ethnic and sexual identities*, rather than reverting to earlier critical methods from which these categories were largely absent' (my emphasis).[7]

In order to look into the formative influences, affiliations and associations of the Birmingham group, this study will have recourse to the autobiographies and correspondence of Walter Allen, Leslie Halward and John Hampson, which have proven invaluable in revealing the veracity of Birmingham group accounts of working-class experience derived from a rootedness in the cultural life and community of the industrial metropolis they describe. Birmingham group writers were thus able to bridge the 'experiential gap' which, despite their ardent enthusiasm, frequently confronted those 'hybrid' proletarians of bourgeois origin who sought to document working-class experience.[8] Offering dispassionate accounts of the life-experience of their fellow citizens, Birmingham group narratives may be seen to function as a form of amanuensis. In his introduction to Walter Allen's *All In A Lifetime,* Alan Sillitoe writes:

> The common man, so called, is rarely able to tell his own story, each person has one, but any attempt to tell it, at least in writing, is likely to result in the distortion of the tale and the impatience of the reader[…] even though he may once have been a common man himself, he needs more than the emotional sympathy and dash of sociological reality which is often regarded as sufficient basis for such novels. Inspiration, imagination, and a certain distance are necessary to turn the material into a story which may be read with complete faith in its veracity. Many people may be writers, but few are artists.[9]

Christopher Hilliard develops this idea and appropriates Leslie Halward's formulation 'to write in my own language about my own people' for the title of a chapter in his *To Exercise Their Talents* in which he explains:

> One of the tasks of working-class writing was to correct the stereotypes and distortions produced by authors from other classes' […] 'In their commitment to writing about "their" people, working-class writers implicitly accepted the idea that it was important to write about what one knew' [and that] For working-class writers, the importance of writing about the lives and places they knew lay in the value of honoring [sic] their communities with a truthful and artistically satisfying representation.[10]

Hilliard develops this idea suggesting it took the form of a social obligation or duty, before concluding '[t]o write a story of working-class life was an act of self-respect and community service. It was a point where the two meanings of the word "representation" coincide'.[11] His observations points up two aspects of the Birmingham group productions I intend to develop

more fully. The first concerns the notion of the Birmingham group writers' 'representative' rôle: their function as spokespersons on behalf of their community, the second relates to their formal experimentation: the adaption and manipulation of the language, methods and techniques with which they presented this material.

I have divided the remainder of this introduction into three sections. Section one will provide an overview of the Birmingham group and their city including brief biographies of both writers and place to suggest how this urban manufacturing centre offered itself as the locus of a new form of Regional writing. Section two will undertake a survey of the prevailing literary discussion as it relates to formal and stylistic choices, and especially how these may contribute to the politicisation of working-class narrative. Section three will examine what has since come to be described as the 'Ethnographic turn' and how its democratic impulse has proven prescient of more recent critical approaches and the methodologies employed in the final chapter of this thesis and how these serve in turn to illuminate aspects of Birmingham group writing neglected by the contemporary theorisation and critique of working-class writing.

I

Functioning as something of an elder statesman/mentor figure to his Birmingham group companions, John Hampson (1901 – 1955) was the first of their number to experience a degree of literary renown. Published by the Woolf's Hogarth Press in 1931, *Saturday Night at The Greyhound* brought him overnight success. For a while he was feted by the London literati in the shape of E. M. Forster, William Plomer and John Lehmann (amongst others), his articles and short-stories appearing in most of the acclaimed periodicals during the pre-war decade. The Hampson Simpson's wealth had originally derived from the family brewery, though closer relatives: his great-grandfather and grandfather had briefly stepped outside the world of commerce to manage the Theatre Royal in Birmingham. Following the collapse of the brewery concern in 1907, the Hampsons moved to a terraced house in Leicester as described in Hampson's novel *O Providence*. His family having fallen upon hard times, John received little, if any, formal education owing to ill-health as a child, and he began his working life in a munitions factory during the Great War. Periods of employment in hotels and public houses in London and the East Midlands followed, in addition a spell in Wormwood Scrubs following his arrest for book theft. In 1925 Hampson commenced work as a nurse to Ronald the Downs syndrome

afflicted son of a Birmingham couple the Wilsons. His position provided lodging and afforded John a degree of security which enabled the time and space to embark upon writing novels.

Despite harbouring adolescent dreams to 'retire from professional football [having played for Aston Villa] and to grow fat in [his] own pub', Walter Allen (1911 -1995) would pursue a different career trajectory. Born in Aston, Birmingham, he won a place at King Edward VI Grammar school, following which he gained an open scholarship to study English at the University of Birmingham. Here he made the acquaintance of Louis MacNeice, currently teaching classics under the distinguished tutelage of E. R. Dodds through whom he later became acquainted with W. H. Auden. Allen is probably remembered more today as critic than novelist yet, by the close of the pre-war decade, his first two published novels: *Innocence is Drowned* and *Blind Man's Ditch* had appeared, with each drawing upon its author's experience of working-class life in Birmingham. On the strength of the former's 'success' (though receiving positive reviews, it sold only a 'few copies') and, with Britain sliding into the closing stages of the phoney war preceding the greater conflict to come, Allen removed to London and 'narrowly survived, writing book reviews and reports for publishers'.[12] Allen's critical works and autobiography *As I Walked Down New Grub Street* (1981) have been especially helpful in furnishing an overview of the contemporary literary climate and the figures with whom he associated.

Respectively, amateur boxer, dance-band drummer, engineering apprentice, plasterer, short-story writer, laureate of working-class romance and latterly radio playwright, Leslie Halward (1905-1976) was, for a brief period during the thirties, 'greatly admired […] his talent unrivalled'.[13] In *Let Me Tell You,* Halward records his birth 'over a pork butchers shop in what was then known as High Street, Selly Oak, Birmingham'.[14] He continues 'There are three ways in which I might say that: (1) Apologetically, as if I were ashamed of it. (2) Arrogantly, as if I were rather more than proud of it. (3) Naturally, as if I were making a simple statement of fact. I would like you to credit me with method (3)'.[15] Once familiarised with Halward's philosophy, more possibly his vocation 'to write in [his] own language about his own people', one would be more inclined to 'credit' him with method (2), for Halward – even more so than his Birmingham group contemporaries, including ex-miner Walter Brierley – was chauvinistically working-class. Though effusive in praise of his considerable achievement, Walter Allen confides 'He had had very little education and had remained thoroughly working-class as if he gloried in being so, though I suspect, as much out of fear of the ways of life outside the working-class'.[16]

Having drawn John Hampson's attention following *The Listener's* publication of his article 'Frustration and Bitterness: A Colliery Banksman', Walter Brierley (1900-1972) became a beneficiary of both Hampson and Walter Allen's literary largesse. Prior to meeting the

Birmingham writers, Brierley had completed the manuscript of a second novel, *The Bare Heath,* in the style of Thomas Hardy. As he recalled '[I] was not cut out for a miner. And because maybe [sic] of an imagination more alive than that of the average miner, I was more scared than the average'.[17] In 1917 Brierley attended Heanor Grammar school one evening each week to learn French. However, his introduction to the world of 'culture' exacerbated his dissatisfaction with colliery work 'this reading fed a sense in me that there was something better in life than the pit'.[18] Brierley's subsequent struggle with the dispiriting and psychologically debilitating strictures of the Means Test and his academic aspiration and self-cultivation are vividly set out in the novels *Means Test Man* and *Sandwichman.* Despite his reluctance to become one of Orwell's 'grimy caryatids', Brierley's perspective as a miner-writer widened the scope of Birmingham Group narratives by revealing how the lives of workers beyond the urban proletariat were managing to endure the devastating effects of the interwar slump.

In terms of detailed biographical information Peter Chamberlain (1903 – ?) remains problematic. His whereabouts beyond 1955 when he was editor of a *Motor-Cycle* magazine, have proven difficult to ascertain. Unlike his fellow Birmingham group writers, Chamberlain's family owned a foundry manufacturing bedsteads and were relatively prosperous. His maternal Grandfather had been Birmingham's first Lord Mayor while his paternal Grandfather, John H. Chamberlain, was a curator of the Birmingham Art Gallery and, as architect, painter, educationalist and poet, was a prominent figure in Birmingham life. In terms of social status, these factors distance Peter Chamberlain from his Birmingham group companions and move him closer to middle-class 'fellow travellers' such as Henry Green who wrote *about* the working classes. Chamberlain had attended Clifton College and, according to Leslie Halward later 'studied at the University of Birmingham for a short time', and had come to know John Hampson through Hampson's elder brother Jimmy, a famous racing motor-cyclist at this time.[19] Although, the irascible Halward seems to have been very taken with Chamberlain, Walter Allen recalls Chamberlain as 'very much the public school man, by which I mean that I found him arrogant'.[20] Allen recounts that 'He knew London at least as well as he did Birmingham and had his own circle there. He knew writers: he had met Anthony Powell', and numbered Hemingway, Fitzgerald and John O'Hara as his literary heroes.[21] Allowing for a degree of envy amongst his possibly less than urbane Birmingham confreres, Chamberlain received fulsome approbation beyond their ambit. V. S. Pritchett credited him as having 'revived the traditional humour of the English novel' and Walter Allen mentions I. A. Richard's encouraging review of Chamberlain's short-story 'What The Hell?' stating it was 'the finest thing in English he had read for six years'.[22]

The individuals mentioned here constitute the core members of the Birmingham group, as defined by cross-references, autobiographical accounts and the recollections of its principal writers. However, I want to remark here upon two significant omissions and additions. The Birmingham writer Kathleen Dayus was a contemporary of the Birmingham group, and whilst providing a vivid account of her poverty-stricken childhood and adolescence in Birmingham during the early decades of the twentieth century, the fact that she completed her memoirs in later life excludes them from the periodisation adopted here. Secondly, though his work falls within this periodisation, I have also omitted the Halesowen born writer Francis Brett Young. In many respects a regional writer, his novels, while exploiting the urban industrial as their backdrop where Birmingham becomes 'North Bromwich', and locations include the Black Country, the Marches and Welsh Borders, Brett Young's stories reflect more closely the interests and intrigues of a bourgeois gentleman, rather than a member of the working-classes. Conversely, I have included a writer frequently, though mistakenly, assumed to have been a member of the Birmingham group and hailing from working-class origins: Henry Green. In chapter one I shall provide an extended account of his novel *Living* (1929). Green's depiction of life in a Birmingham foundry, though again beyond the periodisation adopted here, illustrates the stylistic departures employed by a novelist from outside the working-class and proves an essential work against which to compare and contrast the formal experimentation of the Birmingham group. Finally, owing to his complex relationship with working-class writing and the significant influence he exerted upon the Birmingham group writers, I shall also provide a brief overview of D. H. Lawrence.

It is something of a cliché to describe the setting of a novel as an additional character within it, yet if the Birmingham writers agreed on one thing it was to document the life of their city's working-classes and, due to the fact that references to Birmingham frequently appear in their narratives, it is to the city itself that I now turn.

> They came from Birmingham, which is not a place to promise much you know Mr Weston. One has no great hopes for Birmingham. I always say there is something direful in the sound.[23]

In 1960 Birmingham became the adoptive home of literary critic, novelist and former Professor of English at the University of Birmingham, David Lodge and, as he remarks, these pronouncements uttered by the egregiously snobbish Mrs Elton, in Jane Austen's *Emma,* have been quoted against Birmingham ever since.[24] It is with the aim of re-adjusting such slights and misperceptions that I offer the following account. David Lodge's move to Birmingham had been

pre-figured some thirty years earlier when Louis MacNeice set foot in 'this hazy city' to take up a position as Lecturer in Classics at the University and where, despite referencing London, Spain and Ireland, his long poem *Autumn Journal* includes the following mentions of a city where:

> Sun shines easy, sun shines gay, / On bug-house, warehouse, brewery, market / On the chocolate factory and the B.S.A., / On the Greek town hall and Josiah Mason; / On Mitchells and Butlers Tudor pubs, [25]

Despite MacNeice's undoubted affection, it should be on record that the Parthenon-like, 'Greek town hall', was actually modelled upon the Temple of Castor and Pollux in the Roman Forum and that the marble statue of Josiah Mason was, subsequent to MacNeice's lines, unfortunately destroyed. It once stood outside the entrance to Mason College, once the recipient of donations from its eponymous founder and forerunner Josiah Mason and which, owing to Joseph Chamberlain's efforts, later became the city's first university. Birmingham's regenerative impulse, its mania for demolition and reconstruction, as registered in the cyclical movement of its central library, has become something of a civic pursuit. Phlegmatic as they are and well-schooled in the art of self-deprecation, Birmingham's citizens have long-since become inured to the city fathers' more eclectic planning decisions or, for that matter, the critical estimations of outsiders. What might be urged however, if one were to define a particular Birmingham sensibility or outlook, would be the seemingly paradoxical values of individualism and co-operation, the combination of independence and self-belief that have come to characterise both people and place, and which in turn derive from a combination of earlier Chartist and Non-Conformist involvement and the influx of peoples from many nationalities who have over the years settled in the city and made it their home. Whilst a relative newcomer amongst Britain's provincial cities, Birmingham has claims to a history of progressive and reformist thinking directed to both material and spiritual values. During the nineteenth century, a fusion of the two became manifest in the 'Civic Gospel' preached by the likes of George Dawson, Josiah Mason and John Bright, later to morph into Joseph Chamberlain's 'Municipality'. Chamberlain's caucus-style electioneering during the latter years of the century resembled forms of political activity and local government synonymous with American cities such as Detroit or Chicago, and which, during the latter years of the nineteenth century, found Birmingham operating as a virtual city-state independent of central government.

Unlike its northern counterparts, defined by the predominance of a single trade or industry, Birmingham's industrial expansion during the nineteenth century owed much to the high incidence of small-scale enterprises; its various trades undertaken in numerous small workshops, rather than the large workforces required of heavy industries: mining, steel, textile. Historian Asa Briggs notes that in such small-scale working environments 'relations between

'masters' and 'men' were close therefore, if not always good, and the economic and political philosophies which thrived locally were those which laid emphasis on 'mutual interests', interdependence', and 'common action.'[26] Briggs remarked that 'a large percentage of the workforce were skilled-tradesmen and relatively well-off economically', what is perhaps more pertinent, in terms of Birmingham's further development in the engineering sector, was the fact that the city's Silver, Jewellery, and Gunsmiths', 'quarters' were particularly well-appointed with that aristocrat of the artisanal pyramid: the Toolmaker.[27]

As the thirties distanced themselves from the financial turmoil of the previous decade, the economy of the Midlands, the South East and the capital began to enjoy an upturn in their economic fortunes. As Chris Upton indicates, '[w]hen the "green shoots of recovery" began to appear in 1931, the city was at the forefront of growth, by 1937 unemployment was down to five per-cent'.[28] The recovery was accompanied with unprecedented economic and industrial expansion. Both the 'Chocolate factory' (Cadbury's at Bournville) and the 'B.S.A.' (The Birmingham Small Arms factory at Small Heath) referenced by MacNeice, saw increased production and a concomitant reduction in the city's unemployment figures; these further reduced owing to the expansion of the motor industry. Herbert Austin's car factory at Longbridge became for a time the largest manufacturing plant in the world. Ancillary production spread outwards with Joseph Lucas: electrics, Wilmot and Breedon: sheet-metal fabrications and car bodies, Dunlop: tyres, along with the many other producers of automobile parts and supplies.

In order to accommodate the families of troops returning to a 'land fit for heroes' following the First World War and the thousands of extra workers pouring into the city at the peak of its expansion, numerous housing estates were under construction. During the period 1919 – 1939, some 105,000 homes, of which nearly half were council houses, were constructed. The largest estate, Kingstanding, provided the setting for several of Leslie Halward's short-stories and saw the construction of 5000 municipal houses by 1939.[29] Here, under his father's tutelage is Jimmy, Halward's apprentice plasterer, taking his first awkward steps:

> "Now then," Joe said. "Shove the end of the lath well back against the wall. Keep 'em square now! They're a mile apart this end! That's better. Now tap the nail. Now hit it once. The nail, not your bloody finger! *Hit* it! *Once,* I said! Christ, how many more times? You'll break the bleedin' joist in half! He stood there laughing. "I thought you said you could do it! Come out of the road and let me show you again". (*I,* 59)

Later, not without a similar element of comic effect, readers are acquainted with the ritual of the morning tea break. As we shall see, beyond such documentary accounts and comic episodes, Halward was also well-equipped to provide deeper psychological explorations of character.

With regular wage-packets and increasing amounts of leisure time, the myriad house-owners sought entertainments to occupy themselves. Notwithstanding the misguided impression her citizens were entrapped within a smog-benighted, stygian darkness, Birmingham enjoyed a green and leafy backcloth. As with the tree-lined arterial roads that serviced it, the city benefitted from a profusion of parks, playing fields and areas of 'verdure', that even the disparaging Jane Austen would have been delighted 'to gaze upon'. Swimming pools and Turkish baths proliferated, as did civic architecture, including the City Museum and Art Gallery, the latter containing a prized collection of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, along with a Science Museum, a central reference library and many lending libraries. In 1900, the Town Hall featured the first public performance of Elgar's (Op.38) 'The Dream of Gerontius', though less-sublimely thirty years later it hosted a gathering of Oswald Mosley's 'New Party' whose thuggish acolytes are described in Walter Allen's novel *Innocence Is Drowned*. Football was clearly a large draw and references to Birmingham City FC and Aston Villa appear in Birmingham group fictions. In 'A Christmas Story' Peter Chamberlain's young protagonist rejoins his friends at the bar who were engaged in a very earnest conversation about Villa's inside-right, while Henry Green's association with the workers at the family firm doubtless precipitated this paean to Aston Villa: 'The Villa, The Villa, Come on the Villa. Mr. Connolly stood like transfixed with passion and 30,000 people waved and shrieked and swayed and clamoured at eleven men who play the best football in the world. These took no notice of the crowd, no notice'. (*L*, 380) The County (Warwickshire) Cricket Club was founded in 1882 and, similarly confounding of common perceptions, Lawn Tennis was first played in Ampton Road Edgbaston in 1873, the Edgbaston Archery and Lawn Tennis Society being the oldest Lawn Tennis club in the world.

Beyond sport, cinema proved the most significant mass-pursuit during the thirties. Developments in technology such as the arrival of 'talking pictures' and their exhibition in the numerous, and sumptuous, Art Deco 'picture palaces', not only bore witness to Cinema's 'Golden Age' but also the first nervous twitchings of the nation's cultural custodians as they contemplated its deleterious effects on the populace at large. During the middle years of the thirties, cities such as Birmingham were beginning to see an improvement in living standards. Valentine Cunningham notes that citizens in wealthier areas of the country were only likely to realise and register the degree of poverty that still existed elsewhere when confronted with hunger marchers begging a few coppers in their cinema queues. It was here that large numbers of Birmingham's younger citizens were to be found, alongside their eighteen million counterparts nationwide, visiting the 'pictures' each week and 'pushing 40 million pounds each year into cinema box-offices'.[30] Birmingham was particularly well-served in this respect, her cinemas

numbering some one hundred by the mid-thirties. That this owed not a little to the efforts of Balsall Heath born, Oscar Deutsch, may be less well known. The entrepreneurial son of Hungarian immigrants, Deutsch opened his first cinema in Brierley Hill (near Dudley) in 1928 and his art-deco picture palaces saw an exponential increase reaching a total of two hundred and fifty Odeon Cinemas nationwide by 1937.

By the late thirties Birmingham's philosophical and intellectual discussion had moved from the Lunar Society's venue at 'Soho House' Handsworth where, during the closing years of the eighteenth century, the '*lunaticks',* as they described themselves, had met each month at full moon to unwittingly precipitate the industrial revolution.[31] Having relocated to 'Highfield House' in Selly Oak, the intellectual discussion of the 1930s was markedly less optimistic. The global capitalism inadvertently spawned by those frock-coated and bewigged proto-industrialists at Soho House had begun to unravel as the western world moved inexorably from economic meltdown towards full-scale crisis. The mood at Highfield reflected this, for in a single decade the less-savoury aspects of political crisis, world recession, high-unemployment, not to mention the rise of fascism, civil war in Spain and world conflict would each came calling, with the subsequent discussion turning a decidedly sharp left. According to Walter Allen, between 1930 and 1960, Highfield became the venue, where, as guests of Philip and Lella Secour Florence, 'most English and American left-wing intellectuals visiting Britain must have passed.'[32] Amongst those Allen named were the poets, W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Henry Reed and Louis MacNeice. Radio Dramatist R. D. (Reggie) Smith, Art Historian Nikolaos Pevsner, Architect, Walter Gropius, Biologist, Julian Huxley, Philosopher G. E. Moore, and other notable critics and writers such as William Empson, A. L. Rowse, John Strachey and Naomi Mitchinson.

Beside Highfield's intellectual and literary constellation, another of the city's cultural networks formed around the artists and painters Conroy Maddox, John and Robert Melville, Emmy Bridgewater, Oscar Mellor and Desmond Morris, who comprised the core members of the Birmingham Surrealist Group. As regional exponents of what was an international movement, the Birmingham Surrealists are illustrative of regional movements in the creative arts. In *Surrealism in Birmingham (1935-1954)*, while keen to stress the Surrealist Movement's outward development geographically and psychologically, Michel Remy argues that:

> A corollary was that the expansion of surrealism should not develop solely outwards, but also inwards, not only towards other countries but also within one and the same country. In other words, to the process of 'internationalization there must correspond a process of '*provincialization.*'[33]

Tessa Sidey presses this view by suggesting that the Birmingham Surrealists presented a challenge to metropolitan assumptions. This thesis will argue that the importance of regional artistic production she registers on behalf of the city's Surrealist painters is equally applicable to the literary endeavours of the Birmingham group writers, for as Sidey maintains:

> The idea of a group of surrealist artists associated with Birmingham might register as highly improbable, even a surreal proposition. In fact no other British city can boast such a sustained association with this avant-garde movement. When art history in the West is largely written from the perspective of powerful centres, it seems valid to consider the cross-currents and initiatives that challenge established boundaries and, for a time, proved productive for a small group of committed artists associated with the city in the pre- and post-war period.[34]

However, 'it was in the Film Society more than anywhere else that young artists came together'. Walter Allen explains how it was here under the aegis of E. R. Dodds, that many of the city's creative spirits first encountered one another:

> Very soon after I graduated, [Dodds] invited me to a dinner he gave in a private room in the Burlington Restaurant to a group of young men whose mentor in some sense he was. Most of them were clerks in local government or industry. There were perhaps ten guests, among them the sculptor Gordon Herickx, who worked as a stonemason, Stanley Hawes, who became a documentary film director […] the painter John Melville and his brother Robert.[35]

Allen continues '[Although] I doubt whether Birmingham realised it, Dodds was a splendid man for such a city to have in its midst. How he came to be president of the Film Society I do not know but he was then at the centre of interest and activity in the arts and in the city'.[36] That the film Society became the prime focus of the city's artistic and intellectual fraternity owed more to its showing of what we would now refer to as 'Art-House' productions, inclining more to the politicised documentary of Eisenstein, than the more commercial Hollywood fayre. Remembering the youthful enthusiasm of his first visit to see the Russian film '*We (are) From Kronstadt'*, Allen records '[he] was prepared in [his] excitement to believe it was the best film ever made anywhere'.[37] The Surrealist painter Conroy Maddox described how on Sundays 'we would go to the Film Society, and saw [sic] for the first time the works of Eisenstein, Cocteau, Pudovkin, Fritz Lang and others. Afterwards we would talk about the film or more imaginatively [sic].'[38]

The film society had an indelible effect on Allen; the techniques he learned from the cinematographers mentioned here surface in each of his first two novels. Often honing in on sibling rivalry and familial conflict, Allen adapts montage devices to present vivid, often cinematic

imagery to reveal differing character perspectives. In the following, filmically-lit, interior monologue, Rose Gardiner resignedly contemplates the predicament of her husband's unemployment:

> Then she fell into an uneasy sleep with Dick lying beside her, eyes still wide open staring at the splash of light thrown on the wall by the street lamp. She did not need to be told that he spent the greater part of the night awake. Now she did not bother to wonder what he was thinking about. She knew: he thought himself unnecessary, unwanted, no longer a support to his wife and children, but a parasite. There were times when he sat in the house for days, without speaking a word, far away. It was enough to give you the creeps. (*ID*, 48)

Unlike their Surrealist counterparts, while meeting, discussing and encouraging of one another's literary endeavours, the Birmingham group writers neither committed to a group aesthetic nor issued a formal manifesto; their individual literary styles deriving from a variety of influences. MacNeice's assertion that they regarded the novel as 'social history' is helpful in providing a descriptive frame to consider their work. I would want to refine this terminology further however, so as to emphasise the 'cultural and imaginative' aspects of their writing and to distinguish their narratives from varieties of proletarian fiction emanating from other regions with cultural traditions based upon single industry occupations alone. As we shall see, with the exception of Derbyshire ex-miner Walter Brierley, a close inspection of the Birmingham writers reveals a diversity of influence and social status, revealing less a commonality of purpose than a multiplicity in unity, a 'formation' in Raymond Williams' sense of the term, more divergent than has often been assumed.[39] Andy Croft explains this diversity by indicating the writing of Hampson, Chamberlain, Allen, Halward and Brierley:

> [E]merged from a complex system of patronage and support, linking Codnor to Bloomsbury, Edgbaston to Iowa, critically encouraged and shaped by an intellectual, alliance of academic and freelance, professional and amateur, political and literary, anti-fascist and social democratic, homosexual and heterosexual, working-class and middle-class, town and gown, metropolitan and provincial.[40]

From this perspective, compared to other regional affiliations of working-class writers, where opportunities to associate with other creative artists or established literary figures did not exist, or, where the 'negative' effects of higher education, as Orwell remarks, might lead to the possibility of estrangement from one's socio-cultural origin, the Birmingham group writers were indeed unique.[41] The 'cultural capital' they acquired by means of 'educational opportunity' and 'professional association' was significant in shaping their 'literary world-view'. Being 'provincial'

in terms of their urban location proved no hindrance in this respect; indeed for a brief period during the inter-war years, in terms of the cultural discourse in which they were immersed alongside the artists, writers, poets, painters and academics with whom they associated, Birmingham fostered a creative climate close, if not equal, to that of the metropolis itself.

Geographically plumb-centre, at the heart of the country's logistical canal, rail and road network, yet, as far from the coast as it is possible to get, the 'romantic' associations of seaport, travel and overseas adventure clearly did not attach to Birmingham. I allude here to Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov' in which Benjamin cites the German expression 'when someone goes on a trip, he has something to tell about', and explains how people imagine the traveller as someone who has come from afar and thus impute romance and adventure to the act of storytelling.[42] However, as he indicates '[people] enjoy no less listening to the man who has stayed at home, making an honest living and who knows the local tales and traditions'.[43] Rather than expressing a personal preference, Benjamin saw these antitheses as mutually advantageous or complimentary. His distinction between 'tiller of the soil' and 'trading seaman' marks the port of embarkation in Ken Worpole's exploration of working-class writing. He uses the 'trading seaman' archetype to recover the Liverpool-Irish writers Jim Phelan, James Hanley and George Garrett who, as members of the merchant marine, had crafted modernist, proletarian fictions reflecting the 'dislocation', 'rootlessness' and 'often extreme psychological isolation' determined by their occupation.[44] The collective impulse to work in a tradition constructed upon class, place and local traditions, certainly locates the Birmingham group writers as 'tiller[s] of the soil' in this respect. As Andy Croft remarked their work emerged from a complex series of intellectual and critical associations. Nevertheless, if one were to choose the most significant literary influence it would be none other than D. H. Lawrence. Having 'pulled himself up by his bootstraps' and, notwithstanding Valentine Cunningham's characterisation of him as 'the lost leader of the proletarian novel', the Nottingham writer functioned very much as the Birmingham group role model.[45] I shall analyse the Lawrencian influence more fully in chapter two, however, as a competent literary practitioner in his own right, the Birmingham group member most indebted to Lawrence was Walter Brierley. The following extract from 'Transition', in which the story's narrator describes an anxious mother's thoughts following her son's first day at the pit, offers a flavour of his writing.[46] Answering the door to a friend who has arranged to call for her son following his first day at the pit, the boy's mother explains:

> " 'E's asleep Joe. Not washed or changed. I'll tell 'im you've been."
>
> She came back into the room with tense lips.

> " 'E'll be t'same as t'rest. Lozzin about in 'is pit-muck till bedtime."
> She glanced at the boy, saw the pain of weariness in his features, and her mouth softened. "I wish wi'all my 'eart 'e'd been a gel."(*T*, 95)

In the following section I examine how Birmingham group writing subordinated the 'political' in favour of the 'cultural' by showing how their depictions of everyday urban experience presented as a powerful counterforce to the contemporary insistence that politics was all. As Raymond Williams indicates 'the simplest descriptive novel about working-class life is already, by being written, a significant and positive cultural intervention. For it is not, even yet, what a novel is supposed to be, even as one kind among others'.[47] Support for the value of unalloyed description may be found in the following observations of Salman Rushdie:

> [D]escription is itself a political act. The black American writer Richard Wright once wrote that black and white Americans were engaged in a war over the nature of reality. Their descriptions were incompatible. So it is clear that re-describing the world is a necessary first step to changing it…The novel is one way of denying the official, political version of events. [48]

Earlier in the century, purely 'descriptive' realist writing enjoyed something of a bad press, especially in the wake of Virginia Woolf's chastisement of Bennett, Wells and Galsworthy in 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown' (1923). Their dogged recording of minutiae, the fictional creation of a 'dolls house' in which characters were merely 'placed', rather than (psychologically) 'explored' had been the principal targets of Woolf's censure. Walter Allen claimed the contrary however. A life-long admirer of Bennett, the fact that Allen produced a critical volume dedicated to his work is testimony to the Staffordshire writer's influence upon his own narratives, not least his decision to choose Birmingham as the locus for his first two novels. *Contra* Woolf, Allen argues that in Arnold Bennett's hands description functions almost as a creed or guiding principle, he claims 'For Bennett that life is quotidian is exactly the point about it', and explains that:

> Bennett's aim was to unroll the panorama of life in time through all the tiny, detailed incidents of its thousand acts. It is the almost loving subjection to time as a succession of minutes, hours, months, years that makes *The Old Wives' Tale* the most impressive record we have in English of life in time, of birth, change and decay […] one is left with the feeling that never has the rhythm of ordinary life, life in time, been so faithfully, so surely transcribed.[49]

Clayhanger was marked out for especial praise, the character of Edwin being in Allen's opinion 'one of the most attractive heroes in twentieth century fiction. Bennett, who believed inordinately in the 'interestingness' of ordinary things and ordinary people, was never more successful in revealing the 'interestingness' of an apparently ordinary man than in Edwin Clayhanger.'[50] One might also wish to add the 'interestingness' of an ordinary *place* which leads to a discussion of the Birmingham group as potential inductees into the genre of regional writing. In the passage below, Walter Allen remarks on earlier 'condition of England' novelists for whom the industrial scene presented as a 'moral challenge':

> Disraeli, Mrs Gaskell, Dickens were Southerners for whom the industrial north was essentially alien; the industrial revolution that had made it was new and frightening, an affront to and a threat, and its towns were at once centres of a new kind of power and a new kind of man and the breeding places of a new kind of misery […] For Bennett, the potteries were neither new nor frightening; they were the perfectly familiar home. Bennett's scene, as he realised himself, was fresh material for English fiction. It was in every way ugly, and yet however unpromising the surroundings there is a certain type of mind which craves for beauty, must find it, and where it is lacking, must create it for itself.[51]

Born in 1905, five years before the publication of Bennett's *Clayhanger*, a writer more contemporaneous with Walter Allen, was Henry Green. Published in 1929 when he was twenty-four years old, *Living* (page numbers referenced '*L'* below) describes the lives of the employers and employees at H. Pontifex and Sons the family firm (an iron foundry) located in Bordesley, Birmingham, and established Green's reputation as a 'proletarian writer', an assessment which, given the prevailing climate for a writer's working-class credentials was, as we shall discover, a little wide of the mark. Walter Allen initially judged Green's novel the prose-equivalent of Auden's poetry, adding 'I knew nothing about Green at the time and assumed that, on the strength of the novel's setting and subject matter, he came from the working-class and had left-wing sympathies. *Living* seemed to me the conspicuous and most brilliantly successful English example of what we called the proletarian novel. I was, of course, dead wrong.'[52]

Discussing the formal element in what would today be described as a late-Modernist work, Allen related how the style matched the novelty of the scene described: 'Bare repetitive, harsh, angular, sometimes deliberately clumsy, it is an admirable expression for the blackness and din of the foundry, at the same time as it is attuned to the vernacular of speech of the characters'.[53] However, it was Green's poetic rendering of familiar urban images that most impressed Allen: '[*Living*] showed me the Birmingham I knew caught from a totally unexpected angle.'[54] For Allen it was Green's ability to defamiliarize archetypal cityscapes and pursuits: the

football match, the day trip to the Lickey Hills, the infinities of red brick and the forever circling pigeons, '[all] remain extremely fresh and vivid […] as though set down for the first time. 'New things,' as Johnson said of Pope's poetry, are made familiar, and familiar things appear new.'[55] Chris Baldick agrees, saying Green's re-imagining provides 'a realistic study of working lives and everyday rivalries, but in a modernist style whose syntactical oddities jolt us from habitual perceptions.'[56]

Just as Green's novel prompted Allen to ponder the imaginative potential of the urban industrial, so too his friendship with Louis MacNeice. Praising MacNeice's 'Birmingham', Allen recalls it 'showed me a city whose existence I had not suspected, a city enormously exotic and glamorous, though I could see that the exoticism and the glamour were truly properties of places I had known all my life.'[57] The writers discussed above would each prove influential upon Allen for, as he demonstrated in his own fictions, he had also learned that for the novel of urban life to be successful, its beauty, its poetry, would lie not so much in the matter presented but in the *way* it was presented.

As I have suggested, the work of the Birmingham group has generally been critically received as illustrative of a 'localised,' or 'provincial' writing. The association of these adjectives with the parochial or small-scale has, along with other misconceptions, militated against the wider critical reception of their work. The negative connotations of *provincial* are far-reaching, though thankfully the term is currently under a good deal of scrutiny – the modifier 'Regional' promising a more equitable assessment of such works. In *Regional Modernisms* (2013), Neal Alexander and James Moran choose it over 'provincial', 'partly because it suffers less from pejorative connotations in ordinary usage, and partly because of its greater purchase as a geographical concept.'[58] K.D.M. Snell welcomes the urban novel into his discussion of the genre: 'The urban regional novel is such a crucial part of the genre that one cannot omit it. Nor does one want to regard cities as any less 'regional' than other areas: without making any value judgements […] the regional fiction of such areas should be treated accordingly.'[59] Snell attributes the disparagement of regional writing to 1940s and 1950s New Criticism which, along with various other critical 'isms', encouraged the 'retreat from geography and history into a domain of pure 'textuality' in which the principle of indeterminancy smother[ed] the possibility of social or political significance for literature.'[60] In Snell's opinion the term regional:

> [I]s open to various understandings, but usually involves belittlement of any form of cultural life other than that supplied by the metropolis. It assumes metropolitan arbitration of taste, the superiority of metropolitan people and expression over those of locality – as though metropolis and locality were mutually exclusive terms. [61]

In his TV documentary considering the Birmingham group, David Lodge recounts how – along with many other writers and academics attracted to the provincial cities by the expansion of the university sector and the employment opportunities this provided during the 1960s – he was appointed as an assistant lecturer at the University of Birmingham. He remarks how his move:

> [T]ransgressed a well-established rule of cultural life according to which, London, the capital, is the only place for an ambitious young writer of any kind to live and work in [and that] as soon as a young man or woman hears the call of the muse, they must pull up their roots and move into a bedsitter in Bloomsbury or Bayswater. That certainly has been the characteristic start to a literary career in this country from Shakespeare's time onwards.[62]

Reminiscent of Louis MacNeice thirty years earlier, Lodge recalled how he first encountered the writing of the Birmingham group and discovered:

> [T]hat here in [Birmingham], for a few years in the thirties, there flourished a literary life that was independent of the capital. There was even something called the Birmingham group of writers, now largely forgotten, but in their own way the object of considerable interest to metropolitan critics. The group was composed of short-story writers and novelists who had grown up in or near the city and wrote about it from a predominantly working-class perspective.[63]

In one of the first critical works to define the 'Regional Novel', Phyllis Bentley asserted that 'locality, reality and democracy are the watchwords of the English regional novelist' and that 'the regional novel expresses a belief that the ordinary man and woman are interesting and worth depicting.'[64] Little enamoured at the prospect of the urban-industrial novel contaminating her largely ruralist canon, Bentley's definition nonetheless chimes with Arnold Bennett's interest in ordinary things and ordinary people.[65] In this respect, discussion of the quotidian and regional may be seen to coalesce. As has been shown, owing to their rootedness in the city and their proximity to the locations, everyday lives and conditions of the citizens they describe, the Birmingham group writers were in a privileged position, one unavailable to 'outsiders' or their more middle-class literary colleagues. It is their dedication to describing the local and particular of the urban industrial that prompts me to urge the Birmingham writers and their city be included as exemplars of regional writing and it is to situate their narratives in the broader critical discussion of thirties prose writing that I turn in the next section.

II

Beyond Birmingham's self-contained coterie of prose writers, metropolitan and intellectual 'outsiders' were at this time busily jostling to affiliate themselves with the working classes. Attaining common parlance in the term 'Going Over', cultural tourism has encountered condemnation at the hands of social commentators, as evident in the following cynical, though possibly justifiable, observations of Ronald Blythe:

> Working-class people took on a new fascination. For some of the upper-class Marxists, who had never seen the proletariat except as 'hands' or servants […] the proles were beautiful [...] there was a *chic* in having one for a friend or lover, and it was noble to have working-class standards.[66]

In the TV documentary *As I Walked Down Bristol Street,* David Lodge remarks on this phenomenon, informing viewers that:

> English literary culture developed a social conscience and a social curiosity in the thirties. This was of course a time of political and economic crisis: world recession, unemployment and the rise of fascism. There was, in short, a ready audience for young writers from provincial, preferably, working-class backgrounds who could put into words what they had observed or experienced.[67]

The reference used in the title of this chapter is taken from Louis MacNeice's *The Strings are False: An Unfinished Autobiography.*[68] 'The 'hybrids' to whom he referred were those academics, writers, poets and proctor-intellectuals who, for a period during the thirties, developed both an appetite for the writing of, and a desire to affiliate with, what they considered the superior workings of the proletarian soul. This section will explore the wider discussion of working-class and proletarian writing during the thirties and examine the Birmingham group's response to the ongoing debate regarding writers' political engagement and commitment. It will consider the critical reception of Birmingham group writing in order to consider how political events, for example the changing policies of Comintern during the inter-war period, were active in shaping the contemporary theorisation and criticism of working-class literature. MacNeice's term thus serves as an entrée to the prevailing discussion of imaginative, proletarian literature during a decade in which airy ideals confronted harsh realities and where questions of political engagement encountered those of literary expression - put succinctly, where the *what* of content encountered the *how* of form. Reading the narratives of the Birmingham group against the grain of contemporary theorising this thesis will argue that, amidst the clamour of metropolitan and Oxbridge proletarianising, sectarian tenets and sundry other contentions as to what a proletarian literature *ought* to be, here was a body of work which presented as the practical resolution of what had become a particularly heated debate.

English literary histories have often located the social-conscience or democratic impulse in its poetry. In what may be considered something of a personal manifesto, Auden's 'Letter to Lord Byron', informs its eponymous addressee that he has discarded the idealised rural landscapes of the Georgians to savour instead 'the most lovely country that I know; / Clearer than Scafell Pike, My heart has stamped on / The view from Birmingham to Wolverhampton' [where] 'Tramlines and slagheaps, pieces of machinery, / That was, and still is, my ideal scenery.'[69] Written in 1936, Auden's poem also registers his rejection of much else, notably poetry itself given his belief that 'novel writing [was] a higher art than poetry'.[70] The fact that some three years later, the leading light of the poetic 'generation' named after him, would turn his back on both his own and the collective idealism of what he termed a 'low and dishonourable decade', has subsequently tainted the critical assessment of thirties literature *tout court*. Andy Croft firmly dismisses this view, attributing it to 'critical re-readings of the so called 'Red Decade' [which] have been content to merely explore 'the early work of a small number of young, upper-middle class poets who once joined the communist party, but who quickly realised their mistake and the great risks to which they were putting their art, and who were all in long trousers by the time war came.'[71] George Orwell employed similar metaphors to remark on the political involvements of the same group '[their] tendency to a sort of boy-scout atmosphere [whereby] the typical literary man ceases to be a cultural expatriate with a leaning towards the Church and becomes an eager-minded schoolboy with a leaning towards communism.'[72] Yet such cynical belittling ought not condemn outright the ardour and enthusiasm of the Auden generation. In *British Writers of the Thirties* Valentine Cunningham devotes a chapter ("Going Over") to what might better be considered their 'well-intentioned', rather than 'insincere', aspiration to proletarian fraternisation, and likewise Frank Kermode who displays a similar reluctance to dismiss their attempt out of hand.[73] Nevertheless, a critical preoccupation with the indecision and perceived failure of commitment amongst certain thirties poets appears, owing to a measure of 'guilt by association', to have contaminated other aspects of the period's literary offering, notably its imaginative prose fiction, more specifically *working-class* prose fiction, which Andy Croft describes – *contra* critical notions of 'failure', or worse, 'dishonour' – as a 'small but significant success story', and one his *Red Letter Days* aims to retell. Croft argues: 'As long as we limit our sense of the decade's cultural history to the memoirs of a small group of poets, it is easy to dismiss that history as a dotty, passing embarrassment – a spectacular failure.'[74] It is a salient point that the majority of writers Croft examines belong to no political party whatsoever: 'few would have seen themselves as belonging to a "Red Decade," some would not even have described themselves as socialists'.[75]

Produced in a decade where 'politics was all', Croft's assertion enables a discussion of imaginative writing not wholly predicated on ideas of political engagement alone.

That the economic and political turbulence of the thirties met with a concomitant response in intellectual and literary circles is inescapable and it was hardly surprising that the contemporary discussion of literature's 'social function' would percolate outwards from Oxbridge and the metropolis to the provinces. In *The Strings Are False* Louis MacNeice describes how, following estrangement from his wife, '[He] began to go out a great deal and discovered Birmingham':

> Discovered that the students were human; discovered that Birmingham had its own writers and artists who were free of the London trade-mark. [That] the intellectual students were not so obsessed by politics as their contemporaries at Oxford or Cambridge, since, coming from the proletariat themselves, they were conscious of the weaknesses of the Prolet-Cult; some of them in fact were trying to achieve the old Oxford manner just at a time when the Oxford graduates were trying to declass themselves. […] Reggie Smith, the son of a working man in Aston, and the one Birmingham student I met who had no complex about class, thought nothing was so funny as the Oxford and Cambridge proletarianisers. Not that he was one whose tastes are conditioned by reaction against their origins.[76]

Despite MacNeice's evident enthusiasm for their groundedness and, as he remarks, the honesty with which the Birmingham group writers rendered their environment, their work does present as something of an enigma. Written against a background of economic depression and high unemployment they refrained from overt political didacticism, preferring instead to focus on how prevailing socio-economic circumstances were reflected in domestic, community and workplace relationships. In some ways this restrained approach may well account for their subsequent neglect, for based upon prevailing critical criteria, their narratives fell between two stools, their working-class subject material alienating them *canonically* from the curators of the Great Tradition on one hand whilst their formal innovations distanced them *politically* from the purveyors of a prescriptivist Marxism on the other.[77]

It ought to be stated that, despite describing urban life from a working-class perspective, the Birmingham group's labelling as 'proletarian' writers is a misnomer; as the biographical thumbnail sketches above have shown, their working-class affiliation was more complex and wide-ranging than hitherto assumed. Their differences of social-status reflected the fine-shadings and gradations of a working-class community frequently, though often mistakenly, considered monolithic. In *The Ideologies of Class,* Ross McKibbin comments on some common misconceptions:

> While characterised by extraordinary mutuality they were also marked by backbiting, gossip and a jockeying for social superiority. […] All working-class communities were equally affected: single-status ones by the usual neighbourhood disputes (between those who kept the front step washed and blacked and those who did not, for example) while multiple-status communities displayed real social distances and much hostility between their members. The somewhat monolithic appearance the working-class presented to strangers concealed divisions which were at least as intense within communities as they were within the work-force.[78]

As MacNeice discovered, the picture as reflected amongst Birmingham's 'working-class' *litterateurs* was far from straightforward:

> At this time, 1936, literary London was just beginning to recognise something called the Birmingham School of novelists. Literary London, hungry for proletarian literature, assumed that the Birmingham novelists were proletarian. Birmingham denied this; take John Hampson, Walter Allen, Leslie Halward – Hampson was a friend of E.M. Forster and was not employed as a labourer, Allen was a graduate of Birmingham University, Halward was a plasterer's labourer but even he could not be counted as of the sacred proletariat – his father had been a pork-butcher. It could be conceded however that they wrote about the People with a knowledge available to very few Londoners and that their view of the novel as social history had grown naturally out of their background instead of being, as in London, an apostasy from the view that the novel is primarily art. Though not accepting their theory of the novel, I found these Birmingham writers very refreshing; they at least were not hybrids; they were writing – and writing efficiently – on subjects they really knew.[79]

Valentine Cunningham likewise remarks on the difficulty of defining proletarian writing and its practitioners suggesting 'It would be foolish, naturally to pretend that all 'proletarian' fictions can be shunted together in one capacious category or that they were all written and read in the same way. There are big variations in kind and scope'.[80] Making reference to those who had gained George Orwell's seal of approval in the 1940 radio broadcast 'The Proletarian Writer', Cunningham suggests some additions but remarks on the difficulty of adequately describing the qualities that constitute the 'working-class' writer and questions whether his *own* selections might really be described as proletarian.

> [Amongst] other possibles, some of them [are] a little hard, especially in the more-proletarian-than-thou 30s to place exactly in terms of class origin. Were V.S. Pritchett and Walter Allen proletarian? Was John Hampson? Was, for that matter Leslie Halward really? […] Hampson was

> friendly with E. M. Forster, Walter Allen went to Birmingham University, prior to a career as a distinguished critic and later professor of English Literature. Halward's father sold pork chops. What class exactly – [Cunningham was citing MacNeice here, the question clearly niggled] – are pork butchers?[81]

Cunningham's inclusion of three Birmingham group writers (he'd earlier mentioned Walter Brierley in a positive light, though by the same token he appears to have overlooked Peter Chamberlain) is nonetheless encouraging. It not only confers some recognition of writers whose work this thesis is considering, but also opens up the possibility of including works which, though not eschewing descriptions of proletarian life and conditions, contain little in the way of overt political analysis.

The fact remains that for a brief period during the thirties, the appetite for working-class writing seemed insatiable with contemporary commentators increasingly urging the novel as a weapon in the class struggle. In order to ascertain the degree to which the thirties novel had become politically 'weaponized', David Smith's *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth-Century British Novel* sought examples demonstrating a peaceful co-existence between art and propaganda.[82] Unfortunately, his survey provided little by way of affirmation, although Lewis Grassic-Gibbon's *A Scots Quair* and, that oft cited 'classic' of working-class literature, Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* were held as paradigm texts.[83] In chapter five, titled 'At Last, the British are Coming', Smith focused specifically upon the nineteen-thirties where, despite the prevailing clamour for more ideologically-charged, working-class writing, only a dearth of 'revolutionary' novels were published.[84] It was only in 1936 with the commencement of the Spanish Civil War that Smith discovered a trickle of revolutionary literature beginning to make its 'cautious' appearance in Britain. For Smith it seemed little had changed since the beginning of the decade, he cites the misgivings of the British delegates at the Second World Conference of Revolutionary Writers at Kharkov held in November 1930. According to Bob Ellis 'There are many workers who write,' [and] 'There are also people who write about the proletariat, but we have no proletarian writers' […] to which co-delegate Harold Heslop agreed, 'It must be recognised that proletarian art in Great Britain is in a very bad condition – and is in fact hardly begun'.[85] According to Smith, the situation was highlighted in 1936 when the December edition of the American Marxist literary journal *New Masses* published Granville Hicks' 'The British are Coming' an article which more possibly reflected his hopes rather than their fulfillment, and more probably registered America's exasperation at the reluctance of British writers to join the ideological fray.[86] The situation had not improved two years later. C. Day-Lewis likewise bemoaned the small amount of British revolutionary fiction, and – given the imminent onset of

the Second World War – the fact that the number of committed British revolutionary novelists remained depressingly slight. Smith offers statistical evidence to underline Day-Lewis' remarks:

> When one considers that in 1937 – one of the peak years of extreme left wing activity – there were 1,817 new novels published, of which perhaps only six could have been said to be expressing unequivocal, revolutionary sympathies, the smallness of the movement is even more apparent.[87]

This must have proven dismal reading for those expecting encouragement in their pursuit of a more progressive political climate. The intervening eighty years have enabled a degree of perspective on a decade which, though clearly awash with revolutionary intent, was evidently incapable of mobilising the promise of its rhetoric. Nevertheless, this statistic is encouraging of this project in that, as Smith indicates:

> The point to be made is that alongside the fairly small body of unashamedly revolutionary fiction, and those few books which made clear their continued faith in parliamentary Socialism of the Labour Party variety, there was a much larger body of literature of social concern or social protest which either disdained politics altogether, or else treated the subject with varying degrees of objectivity, leaving the reader free to draw his own conclusions.[88]

It is not within the remit of this thesis to examine why the proletarian vanguard missed its 'historical moment' yet, having explored the many reasons as to why Marxism, or for that matter, a progressive politics of any colour had been doomed to failure in Britain, Ross McKibbin lists the following as possible contributory factors:

> [A] working-class which was highly dispersed by occupation; having (appearances notwithstanding) a fairly low level of communitarian solidarity, following a number of competing associational activities and highly conditioned by inherited ideologies which emphasised a common citizenship, the fairness of the rules of the game and the class neutrality of the major institutions of the state [The Monarchy, The Parliament, The Nation itself].[89]

In terms of left-leaning doctrine, working-class autodidacts were not slow to explain Marxism's failure to ignite their political passions. Jonathan Rose argues that, '[p]ut bluntly, the trouble with Marx was Marxists, whom British workers generally found to be too dogmatic, selfish and anti-literary'.[90] Referencing the personal testimony of workers to suggest that the desire of middle-class intellectuals to politicise and fraternise with them was ultimately seen as condescending, Rose believes: 'early British Marxists dismissed as "bourgeois" the same canon of English classics that inspired generations of autodidacts, thus alienating the very proletarian intellectuals who

might have proved the driving force behind a more creative Marxism.'[91] 'British working-people judged Marxism by the Marxists they knew, and concluded with good reason, that such people were not going to make a better world.'[92] By reading against the grain of David Smith's findings, we are able to see how – despite the prevailing clamour of the Social Realists, Oxbridge and metropolitan proctor-intellectuals, purveyors of the prolet-cult and other left-leaning critical commentators who urged a more politically-engaged literature – by far the greater quantity of British fiction produced during this year (and by extrapolation the decade) was motivated less by ideological engagement than a concern and interest in the everyday, lived experience of its subjects. As Cunningham notes: 'In respect of their aims, ambitions, and the theory of a proletarian or socialist realist fiction, 'proletarian novelists' themselves could evidently differ as sharply as their fictional practises could vary'.[93]

In the United States the response towards an ideologically committed literature was more enthusiastic. Walter Allen, who visited Iowa University in 1935 to lecture on modern literature, was well placed to describe the situation there:

> [T]he social novelists of the thirties were mostly too young to have fought in the war… they had come to age in what later looked like an artificial paradise… Contemplating this world in ruins, attempting to render it in fiction, they took over the mood of the war books, a mood of anger and contempt for those who seemed responsible, the politicians and the industrialists, and of pity for their helpless victims. This was common to social novelists on both sides of the Atlantic; but when we place the American and English social novels of the thirties side by side we see the differences between them. The American novels, as a whole, are much more violent and radical. The twenties boom had soared to far greater heights in the United States than in England; the slump was therefore greater, and so was the sense of shock, outrage and betrayal. [94]

Much of the political discussion in the USA was undertaken in the pages of the Marxist journal *New Masses* – whose 'tag-line' asserted it was *'prepared to act its role as a catalytic agent for the combination of literature and revolution*' - or alternatively in the John Reed clubs that were dedicated to 'clarify[ing] the principles and purposes of revolutionary art and literature, to propagate them, to practise them'.[95] The implications for a literary convergence between Marxism and a patriotism built upon the somewhat paradoxical ideals of the American dream were clear to see. American Marxism sought a rapprochement by linking its doctrines with the revolutionary fervour upon which the modern country had been constructed and where the ideas of freedom instanced in its revolutionary disengagement with the 'Old Country', remained a guiding principle in the national psyche. Dedicated to the proliferation and dissemination of Marxist writing and ideology, *New Masses* numbered among its editorial staff: Michael Gold, Walt Carman, Whittaker Chambers,

Joseph Freeman and Granville Hicks. In 1936 the writer, critic and committed Marxist, James T. Farrell published his *A Note on Literary Criticism* and, in what appeared to many a *volte face,* displayed his impatience with the fervour of politically doctrinaire colleagues who demanded writers adopt the 'social-realist' party line. A staunch defender of the writer's freedom of expression, Farrell's assertion that 'he who would put literature in uniform is afraid of literature', neatly describes his position in respect of the contemporary dilemma. His preparedness to step back from the zeal of reformers, radicals and revolutionaries in order to champion imaginative writing, presents as a refreshing intervention. Just as the Birmingham group writers sought to describe the lived-experience of their class counterparts, so too Farrell, who, as his biographer Alan Wald indicates, '[joined the] historic battle to create a place for working-class life experience in U.S. literature', his commitment to 'the interrogation of "experience" among the non-elite classes was key to his whole artistic project'.[96] Pointing to the bourgeois writer's difficulty in reconciling art with political engagement, Frank Kermode reflects, as had Walter Allen, that 'in such circumstances the Americans tended to be more explicit than the English about doctrine and its consequences'.[97] Arguably less politically committed than *New Masses*, the appetite for accounts of working-class experience nonetheless remained strong in Great Britain. Launched in October 1934, Montague Slater oversaw the production of *Left Review* which actively encouraged contributions from working-class writers and provided a series of competitions adjudged by Amabel Williams-Ellis and working-class writers such as James Hanley.[98] And John Lehmann, though later recanting, had also provided a forum for worker writers during his editorship of the Hogarth Press publication *New Writing.*

Having offered an overview of the prevailing discussion with regard to working-class literature, it would be useful to see how more recent scholars have approached the subject. As we have begun to appreciate, in seeking to situate the fiction of the Birmingham writers within the broader discussion, one is confronted with much disagreement and questioning as to what constitutes working-class writing, what representational forms it should adopt, who should be writing it and, to what extent it should be politically engaged or otherwise. That these questions are unresolved or, in the case of the Birmingham group, as yet 'un-posed', may be due to the inadequate theorisation of working-class writing as a whole, although the crude classification and disparagement of working-class texts owing to a perceived lack of political accentuation has remained a persistent feature of this discussion.

In *'"What Life Means to those at the Bottom":* Love on the Dole *and its Reception since the 1930s'*, Jack Windle surveys the critical reception of Walter Greenwood's novel from its publication in 1933 through to 2011 and draws two significant conclusions:

> Firstly, that criticism always reads into texts the pre-eminent concerns of its own time and setting, but with working-class texts which tend to be politically charged because of their contexts and contents, this is even more marked. […] [Secondly] there is a gap of historical understanding between critics and working-class cultural production. Critics are overwhelmingly middle or upper-class, or else they are 'declassed' by their education and professional status. Furthermore they are at a geographical and cultural remove which renders impossible a full understanding of the local specificities that so crucially shape the style and tone of working-class writing.[99]

Taking the second point first, Windle, as had George Orwell, touches upon the notion of 'embourgoisement' and considers the deracination of working-class writers due to the 'benefits' of a higher education that alienated them from their class; the 'certainty' noted by Kermode, that 'workers could not be writers without ceasing to be workers'.[100] This is a point with which I deal with more comprehensively in chapter three, although as will be seen, the theme of self-cultivation at times features as something of a trope in working-class writing and will be found in several of the texts under discussion here, just as its inverse, the problem encountered by educated, middle-class writers for whom 'engagement' and 'commitment' had become watchwords in their impulse to affiliate with the working-classes. Windle's first point concerns the belief that the critical scrutiny of working-class texts from this period has continuing relevance for our own times.[101] The 'Lessons of History' trope or its inverse in 'Presentism' are still alive and kicking, though, as Windle intimates, critical commentators have on occasions been overly ambitious in their attempts 'to read into texts the pre-eminent concerns of our own time' thereby pushing working-class texts beyond their referential potential.[102] Alice Beja welcomes the fact that '[In America] the relationship between thought, literature and politics in the thirties […] gave birth to radical studies, and proletarian novels and authors were revalued in the 1970s and 1980s in the wake of the development of cultural studies, gender studies [and] Afro-American studies'. However, she cautions this tendency can also prove 'damageable [sic] to literary works' with texts being read as merely 'illustrative of one [social] trend or another'.[103] John Fordham has drawn attention to this kind of 'misreading', attributing it to the fact that 'no overall theory of working-class writing has been developed to cope with the multiplicity of its forms'.[104] In seeking a critical framework with which to consider the writing of James Hanley, Fordham says he was attracted to the work of critical commentators who sought to investigate a work's inherent dialectic or ideological complexity, rather than proffering critical evaluations based solely by reference to a prevailing political orthodoxy or meta-narrative.[105]

As will become clear, the perspective adopted in this thesis aligns closely with the work of critics adopting a more dialectical and nuanced approach to working-class writing, one that places

high value on implicit social comment achieved by means of the detailed description of *lived-experience*. I refer here to Karl Radek's injunction that 'proletarian art cannot content itself with the class struggle alone. It should describe processes that are going on in the classes themselves – their way of life, their psychology, their development, their strivings' and, rather than being overtly or directly propagandistic, should adopt formal procedures that enable the work's political content to emerge unobtrusively. Occupying a liminal space between high-modernism's difficulty and interiority and social realism's commitment to political engagement, Birmingham Group narratives prove responsive to critical discussion directed at their intrinsic cultural value, rather than their dismissal at the hands of a politicised workerist critique concerned predominantly with what 'ought' to or 'should' have been written. The doctrinal aspect of social realism was from the outset used as the stick with which to beat working-class writers whose texts were deemed insufficiently 'progressive' in this respect. In terms of the Birmingham writers' diminution of the political and augmentation of the cultural, the following observation from Simon Goulding's analysis of the novels of Patrick Hamilton is supportive. Discussing the influence of Russian Socialist Realism on British writers during the inter-war period he suggests:

> [D]espite the theoretical importance of *partiinost* (party-ness) it is *narodnost* (people-ness) that serves as the primary device of socialist realism within British Socialist Fiction of this period. It is the actual lives of the people, the quality, peril and joys of their existence that motivates writers such as Hanley, Garrett and Sommerfield.[106]

Owing primarily to the 'cultural', more specifically, 'domestic' issues and concerns they address, especially as registered in the autobiographical element that permeates their narratives and which I consider in the body of this thesis, I would naturally wish to include the work of the Birmingham writers here, for, as Goulding remarks of Hamilton, their narratives clearly demonstrate 'a creative belief in writing about what one had seen and lived.'[107] Making plain the contrast between how things *were,* as opposed to *how they could, or might have been* was axiomatic. In the following section I shall discuss more recent theorisations of working-class literature.

III

During the interwar years, realist and modernist works between them accounted for the majority of prose fictions produced and although realism remained the principal means of literary representation, conflict between the proponents of each mode endured. As both literary critic

and practitioner of working-class writing, Walter Allen was conscious of the double-bind regarding the working-class writer's entrapment between the jaws of form and content, the fact that while many novels by working-class writers remain moving, their authors often lacked the necessary literary skill and education to make them more than 'pathetic documentaries', reliant on 'an over-emphatic naturalism'.[108] Whereas bourgeois writers, though conversant with a variety of modernistic techniques, were often lacking in experience of working-class mores.

According to Elizabeth Maslen: '[Michael Levenson] rightly argues for a useful distinction between a narrow definition of the term 'modernism' and the concept of 'modernity' too often linked as inseparable.'[109] This is helpful for, by separating the representational form from a restrictive time-frame, this distinction ventures the possibility that 'realism' might likewise be de-coupled from its nineteenth-century 'Bourgeois' conception, and re-configured as a medium by which to represent contemporary (thirties) reality. Nonetheless, it must be conceded that each mode was not without its critics. 'High-Modernism', Maslen continued:

> [Is] arguably restrictive in its approach to many of the concerns of twentieth-century life – that complex mixture of personal, social and political, a mix which often results in contradictions and confusions. […] Meanwhile, the term 'realism', so often dismissed as in opposition to modernism […] has provoked much impassioned rhetoric, not only among critics but among writers of fiction too. In the thirties, Samuel Beckett, for instance, refers to Marcel Proust's distaste for 'the realists and naturalists worshipping at the offal of experience'.[110]

A compromise needed to be reached and fortunately one would not be long in appearing, for the 'contested space' between each representative mode would shortly be occupied by an emergent Documentarism.[111] As remarked above, during the Pre-war decade cinema had become the principal mode of entertainment, its tractor beams scanning the wider cultural universe and drawing other artistic and literary forms into its orbit.[112] David Lodge would appear to subscribe to this view; he identifies Christopher Isherwood, Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh as 'representative fiction writers of [the interwar] decade [who] gradually shook off the influence of modernist fiction with its mythic and poetic bias and refurbished the traditional novel with techniques learned from the cinema.'[113] Based upon their adoption of similar practices, I would urge the inclusion of the Birmingham group alongside their better known contemporaries here. For not only documentary cinema but that other aspect of the 'Ethnographic Turn', Mass-Observation, collaborated in providing more adaptable, up-to-the-minute and sympathetic means with which to evaluate and discuss the Birmingham group narratives than had traditional workerist assumptions as to what constituted working-class literature.

In terms of more recent theorisation, though primarily concerned to challenge Modernism's high-jacking of literary critical discourse during the inter-war period, Kristen Bluemel's *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain* (2009) provides a timely intervention. Bluemel explains that the writers featured within *Intermodernism*'s pages – *contra* T. S. Eliot's claim that the 'duty of the poet, as poet, is only indirectly to his people: his direct duty is to his *language*' – saw their responsibility, as writers, primarily to 'the people' and that, by opening out areas of discussion hitherto occluded by the powerful counterforce of modernism, her collection of essays would focus on democratised forms of writing relating to 'people, work and community (original emphasis)'.[114] In his review of *Intermodernism,* Jesse Matz cites Laura Marcus, John Fordham and Nick Hubble's articles as justifications for the intermodernist project. Of the former he notes:

> Marcus proves that collaborations and conflicts between cinema and literature in these years were crucial to the formation of aesthetic, political and cultural categories critical to twentieth century culture. This discovery validates the claim for intermodernism as distinct from either modernism or postmodernism: here, the documentary impulse did not come after modernist aestheticism but instead shaped a modernism that persisted into activities joining aesthetic and realist imperatives.[115]

Matz argues that Fordham's article underpins Marcus' by providing 'proof that we need a new critical category truly to understand the social implications and aesthetic value of writing invisible to modernist, realist and postmodern critical perspectives'.[116] This is also a view to which Tyrus Miller aligns and he likewise remarks upon the 'convergence and complementarity' in the documentary movement's deployment of both modernist *and* realist representative modes during the inter-war period, seeing their marriage within the documentary form as the resolution of a hitherto conflicting and antagonistic relationship (my emphasis).[117]

The past two decades have witnessed a renewed interest in the working-class writing of the thirties. Scholars and critics of the genre such as Simon Goulding, Jack Windle, John Fordham and Nick Hubble represent a crop of writers and researchers whose critical approach aligns with the intermodernist intervention. The methodology undertaken in this thesis follows the 'intermodernist' approach and later, as indicated at the outset, adopts an 'intersectional' methodology. Benjamin Kohlmann and Matthew Taunton stress that 'the breakdown of ideological binaries of the Cold War has enabled literary scholars to produce more nuanced accounts of the political affiliations that characterised the inter-war years'.[118] They stress how their critical anthology adopts:

> [A] broad spectrum of political positions in which sexual, religious and racial identities combine with or rub up against class politics. In a related vein, feminist literary criticism played an particularly important role in laying the groundwork for a broadening and deepening of the thirties as a literary historical category. […] where popular narrative [had] crystallised around writing and politics [...] linked to the narrow and overwhelmingly male canon with which some previous critics worked.[119]

I hope to show how the linkage between the strategies of more recent critical positions and the overview of the documentary and Mass-Observation movements I provide here will contribute to a fuller appreciation of the literary productions of the Birmingham group. The anthropological impulse, or 'ethnographic turn' predicated on revealing the political manoeuvres presented by a seemingly innocuous media often exploited the media's own devices by turning them in upon themselves to lay bare the ideological forces at work on the population at large.

The search for the 'factual imperative' lying behind the constructions of Britain's popular press and media commenced with the work of the documentary film makers John Grierson and Paul Rotha, each in turn emulating continental counterparts such as Walter Ruttmann, Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov. They were followed by the Mass-Observers Tom Harrison, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings and later by arguably the era's two best known writers of reportage, J. B. Priestley and George Orwell, each of whom, by 1937, had completed their respective tour of England's industrial heartlands and, in bringing a much needed female perspective to bear, the novelist Margaret Storm Jameson whose *Fact* article 'Documents' propounded a theory of documentary writing which functions as an interface between 'fact gathering' and 'prose writing' geared specifically to promoting a transformation of the national conscience.

Keith Williams' assertion that 'Documentary' might qualify as the 'Jakobsonian dominant' of the pre-War era is justifiable, though I propose 'Image' might prove a better candidate and would argue for its adoption as the hierarchical term.[120] In the BBC TV series 'The Age of the Image', presenter James Fox explains how visual media were used 'not only by the powerful but also the powerless in order to fight the great battle of ideas that defined the twentieth century'.[121] Fox illustrates his point by reference to the pioneering photo-essays that featured in *Picture Post* magazine. Although the issue under consideration dealt with the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, the photo-essay as a form had been a regular feature since the magazine's inception in 1938. Fox explains how 'photographs drove the story' but more importantly how, alongside

resplendent images of Royalty, the magazine made visible the ordinary people.[122] *Picture Post's* democratic impulse has been remarked upon by Stuart Hall, who suggests:

> [T]he characteristic syntax, style and rhetoric of the 'Picture Post' photograph was a democratisation of the subject [where the] focus on participating actors and onlookers – representative and cross-sectional – raises the "unnoticed subjects" to a sort of equality of status, photographically, with the heroic subjects (here the Queen) and the activities they elsewhere depict.[123]

However, as Nick Hubble indicates, there is a strong case for reconsidering the centre of the democratising movement less as the 'Social Eye of Picture Post' than as 'The Social Eye of Mass-Observation' which had anticipated its techniques a year earlier.[124] Following the credo 'Collective habits and social behaviour are our field of inquiry, and individuals are only of interest insofar as they are typical of groups', the Mass-Observation movement probed beneath the ideological veneer of contemporary reality in an attempt to determine the collective voice and attitudes of the population at large.[125] Hubble comments on the difficulty of satisfactorily pinning down Mass-Observation's prospectus. He cites Jack Common who dismissed Mass-Observation as 'the attempts of nice young men to penetrate working-class pubs and to try to get to know the workers', and contrasts his position with that of Stuart Laing who believed it had a positive function 'in an anthropological context' because it 'fostered the idea of the Mass as an unknown which has to be explored [thus] anticipat[ing] a broadening of social consciousness within the rigid class society of England'.[126] Valentine Cunningham voices similar concerns describing the middle-class lineage of 'journalists, doctors, […] the Left rent-a-crowd in the 30s and early 40s', not forgetting 'the usual heavily represented preponderance of public school accents' that did duty as mass-observers, though it seemed B. L. Coombes and the young Walter Allen had each done a stint of mass-observation.[127] Disputing these claims, Tom Jeffery argues the Mass-Observers 'were preponderantly from the lower middle class like the Mr Polly's and Hoopdrivers and Kippses: Few were in full-time education much past the age of sixteen, although many had won scholarships to secondary schools. Those who did go to university almost without exception returned to the lower middle class world as schoolteachers'.[128] Setting out (in the manner of a *vox populi*) to record everyday life in Britain, and using specific monthly directives in the form of questionnaires, participant observers interviewed members of the public to determine its attitude towards current events, for example the abdication crisis, or the Chamberlain government's policy of appeasement. Personal testimony was thus employed to register not only the life of the individuals interviewed, but also to calculate the shape and nature of a collective sensibility.

Nick Hubble indicates 'the concept of the 'image' […] had a particular modernist resonance that entailed something more than the pictorial impression [alone]'.[129] By intimating *something* beyond 'pictorial impression[s] alone' Hubble invokes a discussion of Walter Benjamin's 'Dialectical Image', the concept developed in the *Arcades Project.* Considered inscrutable, at best obscure, and meeting with no little apprehension on the part of Benjamin scholars, recent interpretations have proved useful and are encouraging of the reading undertaken by this thesis with regard to both the 'affective' potential of graphic imagery and montage effects and also to notions of commodification, reification, alienation and consumerism historically experienced by the individual subjects under capitalist relations of production. Benjamin suggests images 'need to be rescued from aesthetic discourses and endowed with a *shocking*, that is to say, politically effective power' […] for they '[contain] the potential to *interrupt* hence to counteract modes of perception and cognition that have become second nature (my emphasis)'.[130] The desire to shock people from their complacency was *a*, if not *the*, key aim of cinematographers, documentarists, mass-observers and imaginative prose writers alike. Benjamin saw this less as convulsion therapy than the need to reawaken individuals from the artificial dream state induced by their capitalist conditioning. Just as Storm Jameson saw the documentarist's task as gathering a repository of 'raw material' in the shape of 'facts', Benjamin sought to assemble a reservoir of raw materials in preparation for the construction of images that could in turn be deployed to provide a reading of capitalist history based upon the juxtaposition of a phantasmagoria of its archaic or redundant material objects. According to Max Pensky, as with surrealist artworks 'the power to disorient or shock lay to a large degree in the defamiliarisation effect of seeing otherwise meaningless material objects suddenly removed from the context that determines their meaning'.[131] Benjamin's aim was to show how ideas asserting the 'comforting visions' of linear 'progression' or 'development' underpinning traditional approaches to historiography were misguided, revealing instead that 'history is precisely repetition, the absence of real change'.[132]

Despite differences in their prioritisation of objectives, Harrison, Madge and Jennings were agreed that the mass observation movement treat 'images' as social facts. In this they followed Ezra Pound who had earlier defined the image as 'that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time'.[133] In his preface to *Some Imagist Poets 1916,* Pound explained 'In the first place "Imagism" does not mean merely the presentation of pictures, it refers to the manner of presentation and not the subject' […] 'The 'exact' word does not mean the word which exactly describes the object in itself, it means the 'exact' word which brings the effect of that object before the reader as it presented itself to the poet's (observer's) mind at the time of writing the poem (making an observation)'.[134] Hubble suggests 'using the image, rather

than the word [as] the unit of signification', enabled the Imagist poets to 'generate their own meanings separate from dominant narrative associations'.[135] '[T]he author', wrote Pound, 'must use his *image* because he sees it or, feels it, *not* because he thinks he can use it to back up some creed or some system of ethics or economics.'[136] Thus, in seeking a qualitative, rather than quantitative or *instrumental,* response to external stimuli, Pound ascribed subjective experience greater 'emotive' value than the purportedly objective. The notion of emotional intelligence has gained currency in recent criticism. Theodor Adorno proposes 'there's no reason to think a subjective, emotional 'reaction' to an artwork could not also be a hermeneutically 'precise' one.'[137] Virginia Woolf's article 'The Cinema' touched on the slippery nature of the image, although she found verbal imagery more effective than celluloid symbolism.[138] Saussaurian linguistics were similarly invoked, and though *avant la lettre* in contemporary discussions of the 'image', Valentine Cunningham proposes Saussurian 'signifieds [are] mental versions of items in the world', though he is conspicuously silent on *whose* 'mental versions' these were.[139]

In his introduction to the 1999 edition of *Mass-Observation: a short-history* Tom Jeffery draws attention to omissions and 'absences' from his earlier account:

> One in particular would be inconceivable now for the short history shows little interest in how the concerns, appeal and organisational logistics of Mass-Observation were of particular relevance to women, especially but not only middle class women, creating private access to a collective forum and opening up consideration of the hitherto hidden in contemporary domesticity and femininities. Which in turn prompts the relationship to a wider tendency to the autobiographical and diary form in the late thirties, the presentation of individuality and personal record as the mass obliteration of war came to seem inevitable.[140]

Jeffery is hard on himself here, for though the 1979 edition had been published during feminism's second wave, it too managed to overlook issues of 1930s domesticity and femininities. However, the 'Lessons of History Trope' is currently *very* alive and kicking and it is to Tom Jeffery's credit he indicates the potential of the Mass-Observation archive as a resource in the continuing conversation. As Nick Hubble indicates 'The value of exploring Mass-Observation is that the inclusive cultural consciousness [it registers] is not simply historical but valuable for confronting ongoing cultural and political concerns in Britain and similar problems created by the onset of modernity across the world'.[141]

The development of mass-culture which rose to prominence during the thirties, while welcomed by consumers, became a matter of concern for the country's cultural arbiters, notably Q. D. Leavis, whose glum prognostications are well-documented, and Virginia Woolf who held

similar reservations, but nonetheless appreciated film's expressive potential. Writing in 1926 she maintained that 'if cinema would only develop its own devices'; if the filmmaker were able to communicate thought and emotion through his medium, then he would have 'enormous riches to hand […] 'his booty could be hauled in hand over hand'.[142] Less sanguine than Woolf, the 'easy pleasures' of popular culture, the cinema and popular music, met with the opprobrium of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, whose *Dialectic of Enlightenment* excoriated the culture industry considering it an ideological tool for the domination of the masses rather than serving to reveal their plight under monopoly capitalism.[143] Yet, unlike his Frankfurt School colleagues, Walter Benjamin saw how film might function politically by using its intrinsic techniques: dissonances, jump cuts, close ups and deranging montages, in a manner not dissimilar to Brechtian theatre, in order to defamilarise everyday 'reality' and shake the audience from habitual perceptions.

Although such box-office attractions as Alfred Hitchcock's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1935), John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1937), or George Cukor's *Gone With the Wind* (1939) continued to hold sway in the popular imagination, four weeks prior to the beginning of the new decade, John Grierson's documentary film *Drifters* (1929) first appeared. In the 1933 edition of *Cinema Quarterly* Grierson theorised the new form, still a relative novelty to British audiences, as follows:

> Documentary, or the creative treatment of actuality, is a new art with no background in the story and the stage as the studio product so glibly possesses. Theory is important, experiment is important; and every new development of technique or new mastery of theme has to be brought quickly into criticism.[144]

Grierson's documentary *way of seeing*, his 'creative treatment of actuality' was none other than technical manipulation; the mechanical splicing or editing of items 'out there' in the life world which, under his supervision, became ideologically oriented and politically subversive. Keith Williams states that:

> Grierson's own comments about *Drifters* (1929) reveal how he originally intended to demystify and render visible the economic and social structure behind a prosaic commodity. Dramatically telescoping spatial and social distances between labour and consumption, its imagery was intended to shuttle between life-and-death ocean drama and hustling fish-market to underline the process by which labour is converted into exchange value – 'said agonies are sold at ten shillings a thousand …for an unwitting world['].[145]

Although critical responses were varied and, at times contradictory, Williams claims the bulk of thirties fictional literature was magnetized by documentary:

> It eventually became an important position in the debate about the nature of the real, and the question of the most effective form for representing it, central to thirties culture in both Britain and America […] The solution sought was paradoxical: an 'objective' art representing reality as soberly and authentically as possible, while at the same time 'baring its own devices' in an anti-illusionistic manner.[146]

The 'nature of the real, and questions regarding the most effective form for representing it' became the motive force propelling the documentary movement and is traceable in each of its manifestations. As we shall see, the Birmingham group writers adopted the devices and techniques of both commercial and documentary cinema, especially the juxtaposition of images described above, and these techniques figure powerfully in the presentation of class identity in each of Walter Allen's first two published novels. *Innocence is Drowned* montages images of poverty against those of wealth, while *Blind Man's Ditch* pursues Benjamin's task of awakening slumbering individuals from the catatonic dream state induced by their capitalist conditioning. John Hampson deploys cross-class montage in *Saturday Night at the Greyhound* to contrast Ruth Dorme's metropolitan perceptions with the down to earth Ivy Flack and the calculating Clara Tapin. Early Soviet avant-garde filmmakers such as Eisenstein defined cinema as '"first and foremost, montage", {…] a tractor ploughing over the audience's psyche in a particular class context', while Dziga Vertov edited factual footage to make significant connections through 'non-discursive, montage "shocks" in order to reveal the socio-economic syntax behind the automatized surface of everyday reality'.[147] Lara Feigel explains how cinematic devices such as cross-cutting and montage were adopted by the writers of imaginative prose during these years and describes the uses to which they were put, and I return to the literary manifestation of these techniques in the discussion of Walter Allen's and John Hampson's novels that follows.

The democratic impulses of documentary cinema and mass-observation together had excited a good deal of intellectual and creative interest. However, as with the charges levelled against its commercial Hollywood counterpart, documentary cinema was not wholly immune to criticism. Despite his early enthusiasm for the medium, W. H. Auden challenged documentary cinema's 'factual imperative', its desire to subordinate and represent individuals as types. Lamenting the documentarist's positivist disregard of the 'private life or emotions', he argued these were 'facts like any others, and one cannot understand the public life of action without them.' [148] Invoking the issue of class, Auden contends 'it is doubtful whether an artist can ever deal more than superficially (and cinema is not a superficial art) with characters outside his own class, and most British documentary makers are upper-middle.'[149]

In an article for *Left Review* written in 1935 and discussing the need and conditions for contemporary literary advance, Montague Slater suggested a prerequisite for any progress in this direction must derive from:

> [K]nowledge of the ordinary world of people and of things, the world of work, the world of everyday economic struggle […] descriptive reporting is something which the tabloid press has almost replaced by wisecracks, which the revolutionary press has no room for, and which for one reason or another has a particularly revolutionary import (we have even invented a jargon name for it, *reportage*).[150]

Concluding that 'to describe things as they are is a revolutionary act in itself,' Slater's article resonates with the opinions of Raymond Williams and Salman Rushdie cited above.[151] It was to 'describe things as they are' and discover 'the world of everyday economic struggle' that J. B. Priestley embarked upon his *English Journey* (1934) and George Orwell followed *The Road To Wigan Pier* (1937). As each work has been the subject of detailed critical scrutiny, I refrain from further discussion here beyond noting that in their respective use of the hybrid discourse of reportage, Orwell and Priestley each took steps to locate 'the ordinary world of people and things' sought by Montague Slater.

Appearing in *Fact,* Margaret Storm Jameson's article 'Documents' might well be considered the manifesto of literary reportage. Two recent biographers of Storm Jameson, Jennifer Birkett and Elizabeth Maslen, have described their frustration in finding appropriate critical tools with which to evaluate her work. Birkett attributes this to the fact that: 'Only recently have the limitations of the categories and boundaries imposed by the methodologies of 'scientific' criticism on twentieth-century artistic production […] begun to be recognised, and the return begun to kinds of criticism that can read the relations of cultural forms to cultural practices, and recognise the particular operations of particular texts.'[152] Maslen considers Jameson has '[fallen]-foul of the mania to define fictions with terminological labels: Modernist, Post-modernist, Realist (this last usually in a derogative sense and cited in opposition to modernism implying a medium that is incapable of manipulation being in essence conservative, reactionary and old-fashioned).'[153]

In order to analyse the 'ground of reality' that constituted the country's socio-political DNA, Jameson believed her subject matter would be better observed holistically, by 'sounding' a 'cross-section' of social classes. Her concept of 'soundings' thus aligns with the aims of Mass-Observation whose '*May the Twelfth* (1937) – an account of the events surrounding the coronation of George VI compiled by more than two hundred observers – took a deep synchronic slice

through British culture on a single day'.[154] However, Jameson stresses how this documentary evidence ('the facts'), once gathered, might provide the basis for a piece of imaginative writing, as Elizabeth Maslen explains:

> 'Soundings', as [Jameson] interprets the term, offer her readers a chance to measure the depths of a contemporary crisis through close inspection of a sample community containing all the critical elements. […] In her trilogy 'Mirror in Darkness', exploring the links between character and context, Jameson obeys her own rule of letting characters think and speak with as little interference from the author as possible, offering a range of men and women as 'soundings' from a cross-section of English society, revealing each as a product of their background, and how, as a result, each reacts to and is affected by the world they inherit.[155]

Jameson's fictional characters present a cross-section of British society precisely because she believed the 'ideological imaginary' she sought to expose had permeated *all* levels of society. Although Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* were bourgeois 'collective' novels, the practical working out of Jameson's theory in the working-class novel was first realised in John Summerfield's *May Day* (1936). However, the Birmingham writers John Hampson and Walter Allen were keen to exploit the representational potential of the multi-protagonist novel and I discuss this more fully with reference to their novels below. Storm Jameson theorised that what was required in contemporary fiction already existed in another form, documentary film, and she proceeded to enumerate the formal criteria by which this new literature might be accomplished:

> The narrative must be sharp, compressed, concrete. Dialogue must be short – a seizing of the significant, the revealing word. The emotion should spring directly from the fact. It must not be squeezed from it by the writer, running forward with a 'When I saw this, I felt, I suffered, I rejoiced…' His job is not to tell us what *he felt* but to be coldly and industriously, presenting, arranging, selecting, discarding from the mass of material to get to the significant detail, which leaves no more to be said, and implies everything (my emphasis).[156]

Again the process described here; the search for the significant detail (the appropriate image), chimes with the Mass-Observers' treatment of the 'image as social fact'. In its eschewal of emotion, insistence on brevity, and its deployment of key words: 'concrete', 'coldly', one might be persuaded that, in the absence of a statement of intent, declaration of aims, or formalised protocol, Storm Jameson's 'Documents' ought to function as the *de facto* manifesto of the Birmingham group writers. Yet, despite having corresponded with and praised the work of the Liverpool proletarian writer James Hanley, Jameson was rather disparaging of the proletarian

novel, considering it 'an abortion'; few, if any, examples of working-class writing appeared in her reviewing and it is unknown whether she ever encountered the work of the Birmingham group.[157] Nevertheless, as the following reviews, critical notices and statements reveal, the stylistic parallels are striking, each or any of which might function as a paraphrase of Margaret Storm Jameson's aesthetic.

> The writing is so transparent, the observation so unexaggerated, that we seem to see everything with our own eyes. And what we see in these few figures is the life of a whole class. Edwin Muir on Walter Allen's *Blind Man's Ditch*.[158]

> The style at first appears harsh, even crude: it is in fact the verbal expression of an abhorrence of anything like fine writing or verbal decoration or the obviously charming. Its angularity reflects the angularity of a mind intransigently honest, not cynical but unillusioned and sardonic, stoic. Walter Allen on John Hampson's prose style.[159]

> Once again, without emotion, without propaganda, with a calm that succeeds where sound and fury would have been futile, Mr. Brierley has given us a picture of contemporary life almost unbearable in its truth. Anonymous review of Walter Brierley's *Means Test Man.* [160]

> Halward made himself the most objective of writers and the most economical; his stories are stripped; his prose is admirably direct and terse; no opinions are expressed. Walter Allen on Leslie Halward.[161]

> If you want to touch your reader's heart you must be cold. I don't want to know how *you* feel about the matter, I want to know how *your* characters feel. Why belabour your reader with a long-winded, detailed description of a scene by moonlight when a sharper impression is given by the statement that the light of the moon was reflected by a bottle lying on the roadside. Leslie Halward discussing how Chekhov had influenced his own style.[162]

The filmmakers, mass-observers and writers mentioned in the foregoing each believed their work would prove socially transformative, as Gustav Klaus indicates:

> In this sense, documentarists understand themselves as propagandists, who, admittedly, generally confine themselves to tracing and spotlighting social evils. The *causes* of these problems are seldom documented, *solutions* rarely proposed. The leading mass-observers, for example, did hope to collect the material necessary to bring about a change in society; yet they practised political restraint in other areas. One thing alone was clear: 'Whatever the political methods called upon to effect a transformation, *the knowledge of what has to be transformed [was] indispensable* (my emphasis)'.[163]

The influence of the documentary movement pervades the Birmingham group narratives. Though Leslie Halward and Walter Brierley had less access to the wider social cross-section informing Storm Jameson's fictions, the narratives of Walter Allen, John Hampson and Peter Chamberlain each deploy 'cross-class montage'. A feature common to their re-configuration of the realist form was to be found in the eschewal of a single central protagonist, usually the single, revolutionary or heroic figure. Birmingham group narratives, particularly those of Walter Allen and John Hampson, were often recounted in social or collective novels constructed using a variety of viewpoint characters. Barbara Foley applies generic labels to working-class novels which fall beyond the categories of bildungsroman or traditional realist mode, though I consider the term 'multi-protagonist novel' best captures the distinction.[164] Walter Allen's *Blind Man's Ditch* offers a cross-section of social classes, whereas John Hampson's *Saturday Night at the Greyhound,* while certainly a 'social' or 'group' novel is, as with Allen's *Innocence is Drowned,* restricted to a smaller cast of working-class characters often in conflict amongst themselves. Suggesting 'social' or 'collective' novels as the appropriate form with which to address working-class experience, Foley cites the American left-wing novelist Meyer Levin:

> [T]he group method which eliminates the central character, and uses the interwoven experiences of many characters of equal value for the building of a story, is particularly *á propos* for the social novel. By its very lack of a central character emphasis, it declares democracy. Moreover, its multi-viewpoint character makes possible a more complete analysis of social forces than can usually be shown in central character stories.[165]

The literary function was thus perspectival and democratic, it was believed that eliminating the central protagonist, subordinating the narrative voice and deploying a range of narrative viewpoints would heighten of the reality effect. Whilst an undergraduate at the University of Birmingham, Allen had been impressed by Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point,* which, rather than employing a single linear plot, was related through a number of parallel and interlinking story-lines. Following the publication of his second novel, a *New Statesman* reviewer remarked how 'the collectively structured Birmingham of Walter Allen's *Blind Man's Ditch,* 'aspired to being a provincial version of Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point'*.[166] Allen was attracted to the idea of building 'closed little communities', as he recounted to Andy Croft:

> You know it was a great period, a great time for the novel of specific place […] it was a time when a lot of people were experimenting with novels written from several points of view […] the influence of cinema was tremendous, I think, on the 'montage; novel […] what I usually used to

> do was to try and get on the page the image as a film-director might present it. That was what I was after, and I think everybody was after[']. [167]

Allen adopted this approach in his first two novels, *Innocence is Drowned* and *Blind Man's Ditch,* as did Hampson who likewise employed it in *Saturday Night at the Greyhound.* Again, as with the montaged image, interest in a 'collective' cinematic vision of society became common cause with documentarist, mass-observer and imaginative prose-writer alike.

While producing working-class slices of life such as 'A Christmas Story', which recalls the exploits of a young unemployed youth and a pensioner as they attempt to make a little Christmas money clearing snow, or the events that transpired in the smoke room of the Railway Hotel where 'Mr. Marris' earned his 'Reputation', Peter Chamberlain produced experimental pieces in the form of 'Snapshot Documentary'.[168] By parodying and subverting a documentary realism traditionally focussing upon working-class mores, Chamberlain turns the camera upon his own social caste to present short 'found vignettes' of his middle-class peers. His 'What The Hell?' offers a critique of rabid consumerism which, in its critique of material acquisition, is illustrative of the false hope and redundancy provided by the 'wish images' permeating Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project.*

Work, unemployment, housing and education are recurrent themes in much working-class writing of this period and the work of Birmingham group is no exception. Their chief concerns being to illuminate the quietly-lived stoicism of working-class, urban existence and to delineate the unheroic lives of ordinary individuals. Their subject matter, unlike the wider social remit of Margaret Storm Jameson, was often restricted to 'sunken' or 'submerged population groups', E. M. Forster's 'unthinkables', those 'lesser mortals' discovered in the first-hand narrative accounts that historians E. P. Thompson and Lawrence Stone so valued. In this respect the Birmingham writers functioned as spokesmen or amanuenses on behalf of class counterparts who, as Alan Sillitoe indicated, were frequently unable to articulate the shortcomings of the system that ensured their exploitation, social deprivation and hardships.[169]

In terms of a content predicated upon the exploration of the decade's principal themes, the fictions of the Birmingham group anticipate Karl Radek's assertion that proletarian art should not be confined to detailing the class struggle alone, instead '[i]t should describe the processes that are going on in the classes themselves – their way of life, their psychology, their development, their strivings'.[170] On a formal level their writing frequently has recourse to the autobiographical, and in this respect it might be argued they had little need to *gather* the kinds of documentary 'evidence' Storm Jameson proposed; indeed John Hampson's *Saturday Night at the Greyhound* (1931) may well provide the paradigm here. Hampson, as Helen Southworth points

out, 'knew of what he wrote', the novel describes his experiences when, at the request of his sister Mona, he visited the Derbyshire village of Ashover to assist her in running a public house.[171] Renamed as the eponymous Greyhound Inn, Hampson appears pseudonymously as the archetypal Hampson figure Tom Oakley who, seeing more than the other characters, attempts to hold domestic body and soul together. I deal with this more fully in chapter three, where I read Hampson's novel by reference to 'autobiografiction' a genre which, brings together more recent work on Life-Writing – in particular Max Saunders' account of the term with which I would hazard the Birmingham writers were unfamiliar, but one to which their narratives respond retroactively, and which once more serves to reveal their work as innovative and a marked departure from the traditional realist mould in which they have frequently, though erroneously, been cast.

The following chapters will reveal how the imaginative fictions of the Birmingham group, while eschewing political didacticism, share common purpose with the de-mystificatory aims of Documentarist, Mass-Observer, and Writer of Reportage alike. Their choice of subject material and its depiction in a body of socially-oriented, imaginative prose fictions was a conscious act that repeatedly laid bare the social actuality: 'the reification and privatization of contemporary life […] – the tendential law of social life under capitalism – [which] maims our existence as individual subjects,' to which Fredric Jameson alludes in *The Political Unconscious*. This thesis will bring into constellation the innovations of the documentary movement, the literary re-configurations manifest in the multi-protagonist novel, and other formal experimentation to read the Birmingham group narratives against the tide of prevailing theoretical injunctions. It will argue that the Birmingham group writers respond with self-assurance, originality and invention to contemporary critical interventions regarding what a working-class literature *ought* to resemble by broadening its remit to include the discussion of women, the family, and notions of identity occluded by the narrower focus of a male-orientated, sectarian criteria.

In chapters one and two I examine how Birmingham group narratives engage with the themes of work and unemployment. Described as the most universal of human activities, work has been the subject of much social, political and critical scrutiny. Contending that 'work' is not merely a 'backcloth' or 'setting' for narratives of working-class life but constitutes the 'decisive experience', Raymond Williams considers the 'distinctive physical character' of a working-class industrial area is 'formative' and productive of a 'primary kind of consciousness' rooted less in the purposive than in satisfaction of the basic essentials.[172] The Birmingham based narratives of Allen, Halward, Hampson and Chamberlain are illustrative, if not pre-figurative of this. The depictions of inter-generational conflict in the working-class family unit point up the Williamsite

perception that 'the particular 'structure of feeling' of an epoch is to be located in the prevailing 'material life, social organisation and dominant ideas'.

Following the economic after-shocks of the Wall Street crash, that brought the previous decade to a close, chapter two will explore the Birmingham writers' response to work's antithesis: unemployment. While the adaptability of Birmingham's smaller scale manufacturing units enabled the city to enjoy a faster recovery than regions dependent on a single, heavy industry, the return to full employment remained for many a dream rather than a reality, at least until the commencement of wartime re-armament. Having experienced the vicissitudes of insecure work and unemployment wrought upon the family unit, the Birmingham writers were able to document its tribulations veraciously and sympathetically. The opening two chapters focus upon how the Birmingham writers' treatment of these issues contrasted with prevailing traditional male-dominated theories of Working-class writing.

In chapter three I move from this thematically oriented account to adopt an intersectional framework and here the thesis will refocus a little in order to consider what Matthew Taunton and Benjamin Kohlmann describe as 'the decade's radical investment in neglected and non-normative (queer, female, proletarian) identities' to further open up this discussion and reveal how Birmingham group narratives respond to more recent critical interventions.[173] I have adopted this approach in order to recover the identities and experiences of those whose lives have been either occluded or overlooked due to the dominance of the largely 'all male cast' that hitherto figured in the canon and criticism of working-class texts. Pamela Fox has problematized the notion of working-class identity by moving the focus from characterisation towards the subjectivity of the authors themselves. Constructed, as they often were, from their authors' own lived-experience as members of the working-class, the notion of authorial subjectivity has proven a fruitful line of enquiry in the exploration of identity and characterisation in the Birmingham group writers and their narratives of working-class life in the second city.

Notes

[1] Roy Johnson, 'The Proletarian Novel', *Literature and History,* 2. (1975), p. 93.
[2] Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890 – 1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p.4. cited in Nicola Wilson, *Home in British Working-Class Fiction* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), p. 15.
[3] Andy Croft, 'The Birmingham Group: Literary Life Between Two Wars', London Magazine, 23. (1983). ; *Red Letter Days* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990).
[4] MacKay, Marina and Lyndsey Stonebridge, eds, *British Fiction After Modernism: The Novel at Mid-Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 5.
[5] Andy Croft, 'The Birmingham Group: Literary Life between Two Wars', *London Magazine,* 23 (1983), p. 21.
[6] CCCS paper 'Thinking the Thirties', (1979) cited in Nick Hubble, *The Proletarian Answer to the Modernist Question* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), p. 26.
[7] Clarke, Ben and Nick Hubble, Eds, *Working-Class Writing: Theory and Practice* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 5.
[8] 'Hybrids' a pejorative term used by Louis MacNeice to describe the contemporary, middle-class, phenomenon of working-class fraternisation. Louis MacNeice, *The Strings Are False: An Unfinished Autobiography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p. 155.
[9] Alan Sillitoe, Introduction, p. i.. Walter Allen, *All In A Lifetime* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1986).
[10] Hilliard refers to the combination of 'representativeness' and 'strangeness' felt by working-class writers: the 'individualized sense of being different – sometimes, a sense of being in the grip of an almost otherworldly desire to write.' Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Their Talents: The Democratization of Writing in Britain* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 128.
[11] Ibid, p. 118.
[12] Walter Ernest Allen (1911-1995). Bernard Bergonzi (Oxford Dictionary of National Biography', 2004).
[13] Walter Allen, *The Short Story in English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 280.
[14] Leslie Halward, *Let Me Tell You* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1938), p. 23.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Walter Allen, *As I Walked Down New Grub Street* (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 69.
[17] Walter Brierley, Andy Croft introduction, p.viii. Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man*, 2011 edn (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1935.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Leslie Halward, *Let Me Tell You,* p. 250.
[20] Walter Allen, *As I Walked Down*, p. 68.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Jane Austen, *Emma* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 255.
[24] David Lodge, 'Birmingham Dire? Blame Jane Austen'*, Daily Telegraph*. 4th April 2008.
[25] Louis MacNeice, 'Autumn Journal' Part VIII, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 114.
[26] Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, 1990 edn (London: Penguin Books Limited, 1963), pp. 186-187.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Chris Upton, *A History of Birmingham* (Stroud: Phillimore & Co Ltd, 1993), p. 197.
[29] Ibid, p. 196.
[30] Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 280.
[31] The members described themselves as 'Lunaticks' a pun on lunatics. Jennie Uglow, *The Lunar Men: The Friends Who Made the Future 1730-1810* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).
[32] Walter Allen, *As I Walked Down,* p. 37.
[33] Michel Remy and others, *Surrealism in Birmingham 1935 – 1954* (Banbury: Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, 2000), p. 7.
[34] Tessa Sidey, Ibid, p. 15.
[35] Walter Allen, *As I Walked Down,* p. 42.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid, p. 39.
[38] Silvano Levy, *Surrealism in Birmingham,* p. 25.
[39] The formation of the form. This whole range of conscious, half-conscious, and often apparently instinctive shaping, 'The historical process of the objective establishment of certain critical conventions to represent a specific social experience'. The concept of Williams 'structure of feeling' developed from 'the accessible evidence of actual articulations [representations of contemporary socio-cultural reality] in texts and works I could read. It developed as an analytical procedure for actual written works'. Williams believed such works provided a record of something which was a much more general possession, ' the area of interaction between the official consciousness of an epoch

– codified in doctrines and legislation – and the whole process of actually living its consequences'. Raymond Williams, introduction Geoff Dyer, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London and New York: Verso, 2015), pp. 158, 159. ; Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1992), p. 48, 40.
[40] Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days,* p. 181.
[41] George Orwell. 'The Writer in the Witness Box', Discussion between George Orwell and Desmond Hawkins. BBC Home Service, 6th December 1940. *The Listener*, 19th December 1940.
[42] Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', <https://arl.human.cornell.edu> [accessed 26/02/2020]. p. 1
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ken Worpole, *Dockers and Detectives: Popular Reading Popular Writing* (London: Verso editions, 1983), p. 79.
[45] Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers*, p. 321.
[46] Walter Brierley, 'Transition' in Michael Harrison, *Under Thirty: An Anthology* (London: Rich & Cowan, 1939), pp. 82-95.
[47] Raymond Williams, Chapter 6 'Working-Class, Proletarian, Socialist: Problems in some Welsh Novels', pp.110-121. p. 111. In H. Gustav Klaus, *The Socialist Novel in Britain* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982).
[48] Elizabeth Maslen, 'The Case for Storm Jameson', In Mackay, Stonebridge Eds, *British Fiction After Modernism,* 33-41, p. 35.
[49] Walter Allen, *The English Novel: A Short Critical Introduction* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1954), pp. 309-310.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid, p. 305.
[52] Walter Allen, *As I Walked Down,* p. 133.
[53] Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream: The English and American Novel from the Twenties to Our Time* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1964), p. 216.
[54] Walter Allen, *As I Walked Down,* p. 134.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Chris Baldick, *The Oxford English Literary History, Volume 10, The Modern Movement* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), p. 186.
[57] Walter Allen, *As I Walked,* p. 92.
[58] Alexander, Neal and James Moran, eds, *Regional Modernisms* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 9.
[59] K.D.M. Snell, Ed, *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland 1800 - 1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 3.
[60] Ibid, p. 16.
[61] Ibid, p. 48.
[62] David Lodge, *As I Was Walking Down Bristol Street.* (Independent [Central] Television Production. (1983).
[63] Ibid.
[64] Phyllis Bentley, *The Regional Novel,* p. 6. Cited in K. D. M. Snell, Rd, *The Regional Novel In Britain and Ireland,* p. 2.
[65] Andy Croft indicates '[Bentley's] regional novel was written in places like 'Wessex' and Barsetshire […] a sort of literary orthodoxy based on class and geography, into which the 'Group' would not fit'. Andy Croft. 'The Birmingham Group: Literary Life between Two Wars', p. 16.
[66] Ronald Blythe, *The Age of Illusion: Glimpses of Britain between the Wars 1919 - 1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 109.
[67] David Lodge, *As I Was Walking Down Bristol Street.* TV Documentary.
[68] Louis MacNeice, *The Strings Are False,* p. 155.
[69] W.H. Auden and Mendelson, Edward, Ed, *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927 - 1939*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 'Letter to Lord Byron', Part II, p. 175.
[70] Ibid, Part I, Stanza 14, p. 171.
[71] Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days,* p. 21.
[72] George Orwell, *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1940), p. 30.
[73] Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers*, pp. 211-240. Frank Kermode is less sceptical of the 'Auden Generation's aims, cf. Chapter Three, 'Mixed Feelings' in, Frank Kermode, *History and Value* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 42-62.
[74] Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days,* pp. 27-28.
[75] Ibid, p. 27.
[76] Louis MacNeice,*The Strings are False,* p. 154.
[77] Philip Gorski. Introduction p. xv. *Sandwichman* (London: Merlin Press, 1990). In their introduction to the 5th Edition of Raman Selden's guide to literary theory Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker discuss the long-term legacy of Literary Theory suggesting: [O]f all the theoretical discussion of literature over past decades, perhaps the most notable has been the deconstruction of the canon – of an agreed selection of 'great works' which are the benchmark for the discrimination of 'literary value', and without which no literary education can be complete. The theoretical challenge to the criteria on which the canon is established, together with the arrival on the agenda of more marginal kinds of literary and other cultural production hitherto excluded from it has at once caused a withering of the old

verities and an explosion of new materials for serious study'. Widdowson and Brooker legitimise the Intermodernist intervention, in respect of its contestation of the established (bourgeois) literary canon and support the retrieval of texts once viewed as peripheral or marginal to earlier, more 'discriminating' notions of Literature, and simultaneously question traditional critiques and prescriptions of what a working-class literature might or ought resemble. Raman Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2005).

[78] Ross McKibbin, *Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 24, 25.

[79] Louise MacNeice, *The Strings are False,* pp. 154, 155.

[80] Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers,* p. 309.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Had Smith placed his thumb on the scales? According to Nick Hubble, rather than a serious attempt to find texts illustrating the peaceful co-existence of art and propaganda, his project aligned more with the reactionary politics of the Thatcher era. Nick Hubble, *The Proletarian Answer,* p. 27.

[83] David Smith, *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth-Century British Novel* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1978), p. 51.

[84] David Smith, Ibid. Smith's chapter title 'At Last, The British Are Coming', was taken from Granville Hicks' *New Masses* article (xxi, 15th December 1936, pp. 23-4). Both register a sense of irony.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid, p. 52.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ross McKibbin, *Ideologies of Class,* p. 24.

[90] Jonathan Rose,*The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, Second edn (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 298.

[91] Ibid, p. 299.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers,* p. 309.

[94] Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream,* p. 141.

[95] Walter Rideout, *The Radical Novel in the United States* (1956), pp. 144, 145. in, David Smith, *Socialist Propaganda,* p. 54.

[96] Alan M. Wald, 'Introduction to the Morningside Edition', p. xxiv, In James T. Farrell *A Note on Literary Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

[97] Frank Kermode, *History and Value,* p. 93.

[98] Alick West expressed some scepticism regarding the journal's use as a forum for creative writing, and indeed this had begun to abate in proportion to the emergence of political tensions in the outside world. I provide a fuller account of the contemporary patronisation and *patronisation* of working-class writers in *Left Review* during the 1930s in 'Submerged Voices: A Brief History of Condescension,' Volume X, 'Unheard', *Ad Alta: The Birmingham Journal of Literature* (Birmingham: Birmingham University, 2018), pp. 19-31.

[99] Jack Windle, *'What life means to those at the bottom':* Love on the Dole *and its reception since the 1930s, Literature and History,* 2 (2011), 35-47. p. 47

[100] Frank Kermode, *History and Value*, p. 34.

[101] Cf. Jonathan Freedland article, 'The 1930s were humanity's darkest, bloodiest hour. Are you paying attention?'. The 1930s, a byword for mass poverty, violent extremism, and the gathering storm of world war. The 1930s is not so much a label for a period of time than rhetorical shorthand – a two word warning from history.' *The Guardian* Long Read. Saturday, March 11th 2017.

[102] Jack Windle, 'Love on the Dole: What Life Means', p. 47.

[103] Alice Beja, 'Proletarian Literature, an Unidentified Literary Object.', *L'Atelier,* 7. 1. (2015), 68-78. p. 76.

[104] John Fordham, *James Hanley Modernism and the Working Class* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2002), p. 2.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Simon Goulding, *'From Where I Stand,' Orientation and Location in the Textual Landscape: An Analysis of the Novels of Patrick Hamilton and George Orwell'* (Unpublished PhD Thesis University of Birmingham, 2006).

[107] Ibid.

[108] Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream,* p. 215.

[109] Elizabeth Maslen, 'The Case for Storm Jameson', in Mackay and Stonebridge Eds, *British Fiction After Modernism,* 33-41, p. 35.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Tony Davies uses the term 'contested space' to describe that existing within the multiple varieties of Realism alone. I use it metaphorically here in the sense of a 'demilitarised-zone'; the literary 'no-man's-land' between the antagonistic assumptions of modernist/realist representative strategies. Tony Davies. 'Unfinished Business: Realism and Working-Class Writing', in Jeremy Hawthorn, *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), 125-136. p. 135.

[112] Williams, Keith and Steven Matthews, *Rewriting the Thirties: Modernism and After,* 1997 edn (Harlow. Essex: Longman Limited, 1997), p. 164.
[113] David Lodge, *Working with Structuralism: Essays and Reviews on Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 8.
[114] T. S. Eliot cited in, Kristin Bluemel '*Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 6.
[115] Jesse Matz, Review of 'Kristin Bluemel '*Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), in *Modernism/modernity,* 18.3. September (2011). 665-667. p. 666.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Tyrus Miller, 'Documentary/Modernism: Convergence and Complementarity in the 1930s', *Modernism/modernity,* Volume 9. (2002) 225-241. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/23489> [accessed 14/09/2016]
[118] Kohlmann, Benjamin and Matthew Taunton, *A History of 1930s British Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 4.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Matejka, Ladislav and Krystina Pomorska Eds: *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views* (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1978). pp. 82-7. 'We may seek a *dominant* not only in the work of an individual artist and not only in the poetic canon, the set of norms of a given poetic school, *but also in the art of a given epoch viewed as a particular whole.'* (my italics). From Keith Williams chapter 'Post/Modern Documentary: Orwell, Agee and the New Reportage' discussion of the Jakobsonian 'dominant' cited in Williams and Matthews, Eds, *Rewriting the Thirties*, p. 164.
[121] James Fox, BBC Television Programme *The Age of the Image,* Episode 2, 'Power Games'. Broadcast Tuesday 10th March 2020.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Stuart Hall cited in Nick Hubble, *Mass Observation and Everday Life* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 162.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Stuart Laing chapter 'Presenting Things As They Are': John Sommerfield's May Day and Mass Observation', in Frank Gloversmith, *Class Culture and Social Change: A New View of the Thirties* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980), p. 153.
[126] Nick Hubble, *Mass Observation*, pp. 2, 3.
[127] Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties,* p. 338.
[128] Nick Hubble, *Mass-Observation,* p. 81.
[129] Ibid, p. 6.
[130] Max Pensky, 'Method and Time: Benjamin's Dialectical Images' *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 177-198. p. 179.
[131] Ibid, p. 186.
[132] Ibid, p. 190.
[133] Ezra Pound, 'Some Don'ts By An Imagiste' in *Imagist Poetry* ed, Peter Jones (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 130.
[134] Ezra Pound, Preface to 'Some Imagist Poets 1916'. In Peter Jones, *Imagist Poetry,* pp. 136, 137.
[135] Nick Hubble, *Mass-Observation,* p. 6.
[136] Ezra Pound, article 'Vorticism', 'Fortnightly Review', London, September 1914, p. 468. In Peter Jones *Imagist Poetry,* p. 21.
[137] Theodor Adorno, '*Minima Moralia*: *reflections from damaged Life'*, translated by E .F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005) pp. 69, 70. Cf. David James', 'Zadie Smith's Style of Thinking', Post45*,* 5, 22/09/2020. pp. 1-11. Providing a useful entrée into 'affect studies' this article would form the basis of an illuminating, alternative analysis of the 'sentimental' aspect in Birmingham group narratives.
[138] Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema', *The Nation and Athenaeum,* xxxix. No.13. 3rd July (1926).
[139] Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of The Thirties,* p. 6
[140] Tom Jeffery, 'Mass Observation Archive Occasional Paper 10' (Sussex: University of Sussex, 1999), Introduction 1999 edition of *Mass Observation: a short history.*
[141] Nick Hubble, *Mass-Observation,* p. 6.
[142] Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema' *The Nation and Athenaeum.* xxxix (1926).
[143] Stuart Jefferies, *Grand Hotel Abyss* (London: Verso, 2016), p. 186.
[144] John Grierson, *Cinema Quarterly*, Autumn 1933, p. 8.
[145] Williams and Matthews Eds, *Rewriting the Thirties,* p. 166.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Richard Taylor, *The Eisenstein Reader*, pp.82, 56. cited in Lara Feigel 'Buggery and Montage: Birmingham And Bloomsbury In The 1930s' in Anna Burrells and others Eds, *Woolfian Boundaries* (South Carolina: Clemson University Press, 2007), 51-57. p. 54.
[148] W.H. Auden. Review of *Documentary Film.* By Paul Rotha. *The English Auden,* Ed, Edward Mendelson, p. 354 et seq. ; Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers,* p. 338.

[149] Auden, Ibid.
[150] Montague Slater, *Left Review,* May 1935, pp. 364-5, in Stuart Laing chapter 'Presenting Things As They Are' in Frank Gloversmith, *Class Culture and Social Change,* p. 142.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Jennifer Birkett, *Margaret Storm Jameson: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 5.
[153] Elizabeth Maslen, 'The Case For Margaret Storm Jameson', in Mackay, Stonebridge Eds, *British Fiction After Modernism,* 33-41. p. 33.
[154] Kohlmann and Taunton, *A History of 1930s British Literature,* p. 3.
[155] Elizabeth Maslen, 'A Cassandra with Clout: Storm Jameson, Little Englander and Good European', in Kristen Bluemel, *Intermodernism,* 21-37. p. 27.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Margaret Storm Jameson, *Journey From the North*, Part 1, cited in Jennifer Birkett, *Magaret Storm Jameson,* p. 149.
[158] Edwin Muir, advertising copy/review from '*The Listener* (1939) cited in Walter Allen's *Blind Man's Ditch.*
[159] Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream,* p. 226.
[160] The *TLS*, 11th April 1935. The *TLS* reviewer praised Brierley's 'detachment', as did the *Economist* reviewer who praised its '*unemphatic* manner'. Cited in Croft, introduction to *Means Test Man,* pp *xii, xiii.*
[161] Walter Allen, *The Short Story in English,* p. 275.
[162] Leslie Halward, *Let Me Tell You*, pp. 227-228.
[163] H. Gustav Klaus, *The Literature of Labour* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1985), p. 131.
[164] Stuart Laing cites John Summerfield's *May Day* as the epitome of the reportage novel. Whilst not accentuating the political element as much as Sommerfield, Henry Green had employed cinematic techniques in *Living* some seven years previously. Barbara Foley offers a comprehensive discussion of the 'collective' and 'social' novel in *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1921-1941* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993) pp. 362-441.
[165] Meyer Levin, 'Novels of Another War', *The Clipper,* 1: 5 (August 1940), in Barbara Foley. *Radical Representations,* p. 363.
[166] Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days,* p. 256.
[167] Walter Allen letter to Andy Croft cited in Croft, *Red Letter Days,* p. 256.
[168] Bashir Abu-Manneh, *Fiction of the New Statesman 1913-1939* (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2011), pp. 193-197.
[169] Frank O'Connor,'The Lonely Voice' from Charles E. May. Editor: *Short Story Theories* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976), p. 88. Various terms for the working-classes have included Frank O'Connor's: 'submerged population groups', Matthew Arnold's 'Sunken' and E. M. Forster's 'unthinkables'. The term: 'The Precariat' is a compound deriving from proletariat/precarious.
[170] Karl Radek, Speech delivered to the Soviet Writers Congress (1934). 'Contemporary World Literature and the tasks of Proletarian Art', Marxist Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/Radek> [accessed 26th Oct 2020]
[171] Helen Southworth. Introduction, John Hampson, *Saturday Night at the Greyhound* (Valancourt Books: Richmond, Virginia, 2014). The Greyhound, Grovelace was a fictionalised version of The Nettle Inn, in Ashover Derbyshire.
[172] Raymond Williams, Phil O'Brien, 'The De-Industrial Novel' in Clarke and Hubble, *Working-Class Writing*, 229-246. pp. 229, 230.
[173] Kohlmann and Taunton. *A History of 1930s British Literature*, pp. 8, 9.

Chapter One

This Working Life: Work and the Workplace

Comrades who when the sirens roar
From office shop and factory pour
'Neath evening sky;
By cops directed to the fug
Of talkie houses for a drug
Or down canals to find a hug
Until you die:

'A Communist to Others'. Stanza 1. W. H. Auden (1932)[1]

Adrian Caesar indicates that '[Auden's] poem opens by ostensibly addressing the working class.' [2] It's somewhat condescending summation of proletarian existence reflects the paradoxical attitudes of distaste and attraction held by contemporary leftist intellectuals towards the working class whose rescue from bourgeois exploitation and penury it was, for a period during the thirties, their aim to assist. Though he would later recant and revise the extent of his own and his caste's political ambitions, the first stanza of Auden's poem supplies iconic images of the urban-industrial that would inform many a Birmingham group narrative.

The theme of work as universal human activity was part and parcel of the realist tradition informing the nineteenth-century condition of England novels that developed in parallel with the industrial revolution. Prior to Auden, Victorian reformers such as Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin and William Morris spoke with lofty erudition on both its importance and degradation. Carlyle's 'Gospel of Work' declaimed on the sacredness of man's labour, although, as with Ruskin and Morris, his views were more applicable to those engaged in artisanal or artistically creative labour; the kinds of alienating, repetitive industrial work available to their working-class contemporaries afforded little opportunity for spiritual salvation.[3] Contrary to such noble sentiments, 'Work', as experienced in the form of the division of labour intrinsic to modern industrial production, was, during the early years of the thirties, more generally characterised in terms of arduous servitude entailed in the class-struggle, a chore generally undertaken at best dutifully, more often, reluctantly.

Recent studies have proven more positive however. In their research into the ideals of intellectual development and self-cultivation to which this thesis will turn in chapter three, Kate Soper and Martin Ryle suggest 'work considered in an abstract philosophical-anthropological sense, is not dispensable to self-realisation. To argue that people would be better fulfilled if they did less work is not to argue that they would be more fulfilled if they did none'.[4] They are aware that:

> Human beings derive satisfactions from the forms of objectification of themselves provided by work, the social orientation of their labours, the deployment of skills and expenditure of effort involved. This is a satisfaction associated with subordination of the self (to the needs of the community at large, to the demands of a collective practice or operation, to the sheer rhythm of physical exertion, and so on); it is distinct from the expressive and self-reflective forms of self-realisation that derive from culture.[5]

H. Gustav Klaus is supportive of this position and explains:

> It is in the thematisation of work, in all its particulars and consequences that the central tradition of proletarian story-telling finds its most frequent and common expression. Work as necessity, as ethos, as toil, but also in numerous concrete concerns such as the physical side of the labour process.[6]

Contrary to traditional realist accounts of workers as *sub species aeternitatis* and in opposition to 'classic nineteenth-century middle-class perspectives' that saw industry as 'merely a factory building that issues smoke,'[7] H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight trace:

> [A] shift from the Captain of Industry novels of the early Victorian period, through the capital and labour genre of the following decades, to an emphatic concentration on the working-class environment. In its growing confidence, even militancy, this type of working-class novel becomes the dominant form in the first half of the twentieth century […] The representation of the work of ordinary men and women and the analysis of its economic, social and political implications are the unique contributions of industrial fiction to the literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[8]

The representation of work and 'the analysis of its economic, social and political implications' is therefore central to situating the narratives of the Birmingham group in a world increasingly structured around the commodification and exchange values of industrial capitalism; especially during an era in which the existential threats of economic depression, inordinately high

unemployment figures and imminent world-scale conflict were present. As Chris Baldick observes:

> A curious feature of most English Industrial novels of the thirties, as in the 1840s and 1850s, is that they devote little if any space to the description of work itself. […] novels about factory or colliery life tend to steer clear of the shop floor and coal face in favour of the strike meeting, the pub, or the family kitchen. Given that several prominent novels of working-class life in the Thirties were concerned principally with the unemployed, the omission of the labour process has an evident justification.[9]

In providing accounts of work and the workplace in a variety of occupations, the novels and short stories of the Birmingham writers prove an exception to this rule. Thematically speaking, the discussion of work permeates, albeit indirectly, the opening two chapters of this thesis, for, considered in purely financial terms, unemployment cannot be considered as anything but work's antithesis, the negative experience or state of not having: being without 'work'. The Birmingham group writers explore the psychological damage and darker implications wrought by an individual's estrangement from work which inversely point to its positive value as an activity beyond the purely remunerative.

The momentous changes taking place in the industrial re-structuring of thirties Britain would have significant social and historical implications for the working-classes. This chapter will address not only the contextual element: the representations of work and workplace in the experiences of the men and women who feature so prominently in Birmingham group fiction, but will also attend to the formal means: the innovations by which its authors sought to extend and re-configure traditional narrative modes in order to depict the contemporary experience of work. Again, as Gustav Klaus explains: 'In sum, what was at stake was not whether to retain or write-off the (traditional realist) novel form, but how the genre could be '*umfunktioniert*' [re-configured] so as best to serve its overriding purpose, an imaginative grasp of reality, but now [in] the historical interests of the working class.'[10]

In *Dividing Lines: Poetry, Class and Ideology in the Thirties*, Adrian Caesar undertakes a re-evaluation of the decade's poetic legacy. As the title of his opening chapter, 'The Myth of the Hungry Decade', implies, Caesar's aims to problematize received accounts of pre-war socio-economic history – in particular those portraying an England tottering on the brink of revolution or about to sink under economic depression – in which he finds '[*a*] *rhetoric of dramatic exaggeration* prompted other generalisations without adequate supporting evidence' (my emphasis).[11] Caesar's purpose is to challenge the dominance of the so-called 'Auden Generation' poets whose work he

suggests aligned with the ideological position inherent in this rhetoric but from which he steps back in order to present a more considered overview. His distantiation from received accounts is not to understate the gravity of contemporary social and political issues, for he decries the intolerably high levels of unemployment that dogged these years and which, by the winter of 1932-33, touched three million and failed to drop significantly below this for the remainder of the decade. Nevertheless, in the interests of a less emotive response, he counsels 'it is salutary to remember that there was never less than seventy-five per cent of the population *in* work (my emphasis).'[12] Caesar's use of the percentage 'employed', as opposed to the more usual 'unemployed' statistic, does provoke a re-consideration, as he suggests '[a]gainst the regional unemployment affecting Northern Ireland, industrial Scotland, the North East, South Wales and Lancashire, one has to balance the new industrial structure which was being established in the South of England.'[13] This position is echoed by historian Chris Cook who suggests '[t]he crisis in the traditional industries that had once helped make Britain the workshop of the world had been exacerbated by the heavy *concentration* of these industries in certain areas' (original emphasis).[14]

The following discussion appropriates aspects of Caesar's re-envisioning, for the social and economic developments he describes have significant implications for the discussion of work and its centrality in the writing of Birmingham group. While the traditional, large scale and labour-intensive industries of shipbuilding, coal, steel and cotton were suffering inordinately due to changes in demand and the instability of world markets, a boom was taking place in the manufacture of domestic consumer durables; light electrical goods were in increasingly high demand following the integration of the country's electricity supply in the National Grid (1933). As with the South and South East, the towns and cities of the Midlands, notably Birmingham where, as Auden had read 'there [was] a boomlet on' and Coventry were experiencing significant levels of industrial expansion.[15] In addition to the work ethos deriving from the combination of Non-Conformism and the Civic Gospel once preached by Birmingham's Victorian elders, the city was home to a proliferation of small to medium-scale engineering firms able to 're-jig', both literally and metaphorically dependent on the invisible hand of market requirements. Examples included the manufacture of armaments and munitions manufacture during the Great, and run up to the Second, War, each of which found the 'city of a thousand trades' well-placed to capitalise on the upsurge in demand. During the mid-thirties, in addition to having a major motor manufacturer in the shape of Herbert Austin's motor company at Longbridge, and, owing to the multitude of components required in automobile manufacture, the city's car parts producers, Fisher and Ludlow (coachwork/car bodies), Dunlop (tyres), Joseph Lucas (electrical

components), amongst many others, each held virtual monopolies on the supply of their products to the country's other motor manufacturers. As Chris Cook explains:

> The paradox of Britain in the thirties was that the country was effectively becoming divided into two nations: a prosperous South, of new industries, low unemployment and a rising standard of living, and a distressed North. Thus, whilst the unemployment rate in Jarrow was 67 per cent, in St. Albans it was 3.9 per cent, in Coventry 5 per cent and in Luton 7 per cent.[16]

Caesar claims those of the working population fortunate enough to remain in employment saw an increase in living standards calculated at between about fifteen and eighteen per cent.[17] Providing quantitative data to support this significant North/South differential, he suggests 'these figures help towards an understanding [that] the most pertinent political question of the decade as far as Britain is concerned was 'not why the swing to political extremism was so great, but why it was, in fact so small'.[18] Again, this inverted perspective supports Ross McKibbin's assertion regarding the British working-class' lack of enthusiasm for any form of rejectionist politics and bolsters Caesar's argument that, despite their well-intentioned impulse, the politicisation and social-passing of the 'Auden Generation' and other Leftist intellectuals stemmed from what was essentially a misreading of the contemporary situation, as P. D. Anthony suggests:

> There is little evidence […] of industrial employees […] rejecting the demands of the industrial environment. This may be because the demands are essentially acceptable, or because the workers see their work as instrumental to other satisfactions […] Although there is no opposition from the worker there seems to be a great deal of sympathy for his lot. It seems that the failure of the unions and workers to follow the 'proctor-intellectuals' and students to the barricades may be the result of fundamental differences of perception in which the intellectuals' sympathy for the workers is not reflected by the workers' view of themselves.[19]

Statistical evidence aside, if we require a qualitative view of the experience of work, working conditions; the specific nature of those extrinsic satisfactions or, most important of all; the 'workers' view of themselves' during this period, we shall need to look elsewhere, for, as E. P. Thompson explains:

> [At] this point a further series of difficulties begins, since the term 'standard' leads us from data amenable to statistical measurement (wages or articles of consumption) to those satisfactions that are sometimes described by statisticians as 'imponderables'. From food we are led to homes, from homes to health, from health to family life, and thence to leisure, work discipline, education and play, intensity of labour and so on. From the standard-of-life we pass to way-of-life. But the two are not the same. The first is a measurement of quantities: the second a description (and

> sometimes an evaluation) of qualities. Where statistical evidence is appropriate to the first, we must rely largely upon 'literary evidence' as to the second.[20]

The industrial re-structuring of the Midlands and South East described above locates Birmingham at the temporal and geographical epicentre. Nevertheless, without wishing to question the Gradgrindian efficacy of statistical data, if we require an insight into the effect of such transformations on the lives of working people it is to the 'literary evidence' we must turn. Thompson accords imaginative narrative high-status as the discourse best equipped to evaluate the 'imponderables' statisticians found so troubling and his observations thus prompt a move from quantitative socio-economics to an examination of the decade's literary offering. Citing Raymond Williams, Phil O'Brien asserts that 'work and the industrial landscape have not simply provided backdrops or settings to stories about working-class life; work is the "decisive experience", giving rise to a "structure of feeling" predicated on and emerging from the "distinctive physical character" of a specific working-class industrial area.'[21] As had Thompson, Williams saw that it was in the literary representations of a period that one might experience 'the area of interaction between the official consciousness of an epoch and the whole process of actually living its consequences'.[22]

Discussing some of the better known working-class novels published during the thirties, Chris Baldick references Walter Greenwood's *Love On The Dole,* Walter Brierley's *Means Test Man,* and John Hampson's *Saturday Night At The Greyhound.*[23] His selection of Greenwood and the two 'Birmingham Group' writers is encouraging for, as I have intimated, it situates the novel of the urban industrial in a discussion of the regional novel, which had hitherto been the preserve of a distinctly rural fayre. Baldick's reiteration of the naturalistic and autobiographical elements he finds in these works is consistent with his observation that whilst 'modernist experimentation [has] commanded more critical attention, realist fictions still comprise the mainstream of the English novel during this period.'[24] However, Baldick omits to mention that working-class novelists in general, and members of the Birmingham group in particular, were also engaged in a process of formal experimentation. H. Gustav Klaus considered the reconfiguration of the traditional *realist* novel a necessary step in communicating the 'ideological correlate' he believed the term 'socialism' [sought] to comprehend' which, in his view, determined the value of a literary work, the fact that it was written 'in the historical interests of the working class.'[25] Klaus touches upon the theme of political commitment that permeated the discussion of working-class literature during the pre-war decade and which this thesis will address in the discussion of Henry Green's *Living* below and by reference to Theodor Adorno's views on the 'non-propositional content' of the artwork in the following chapter.

In the Introduction, I proposed that rather than being regarded as a 'school' or movement dedicated to an agreed project, Birmingham group writers might better be viewed as sharing a 'multiplicity in unity.' Their *unity* evident in a similarity of content; a shared project to chronicle the lives of their working-class contemporaries, their *multiplicity* consisting in the differing formal styles by which they represented this content and which derive in turn from the differing gradations in their social status and aesthetic education within the working-class. In this respect their literary productions challenge the monolithic conception of the working-class writer offered by commentators such as Roy Johnson and Carole Snee. Johnson claims the '[working-class writer's] probable lack of an aesthetic education – the sheer lack of time and leisure in which to read – [might] militate against his [sic] developing the skills necessary to transcend bourgeois aesthetic values.'[26] Whereas Snee suggests 'the written word [was] not a means of communication specifically valued by the working-class and, [as] there was no available working-class fictional practice on which these writers could draw working-class writers simply aped the available (naturalist or realist) modes which presented as, 'the most readily available [means] of expression for writers not schooled within a literary tradition.'[27] This chapter repudiates these characterisations by providing examples of the Birmingham group writers' formal innovations and their willingness to experiment within, often beyond, the parameters of the narrowly realist tradition under which their writing has generally been subsumed.

As a member of the working-class and, in terms of his literary success, as a 'local boy made good,' Nottingham's D. H. Lawrence functioned very much as a role model for members of the Birmingham group and Walter Brierley in particular. However, somewhat nearer in spirit, subject matter and stylistic ambition, at least to Walter Allen and John Hampson, was Henry Green. Deriving from Green's experience of work in a Birmingham foundry, *Living* (1929) remains – in the estimation of several writers and critics – 'the best proletarian novel ever written.'[28] As mentioned in the introduction, Green's novel may appear a somewhat incongruous addition to this thesis, falling outside the remit in terms of periodisation but also, despite setting and subject matter, due to the fact it was written by a member of the middle-classes who was neither a Birmingham citizen, nor member of the Birmingham group. However, Green's inclusion owes more to the critical attention his novel received following publication and which it continues to excite. Though widely praised, *Living*'s modernist rendering of working-class life problematises the definition of what a working-class text ought to be. It is included here as a 'case in point', rather than functioning as a paradigm text or Arnoldian 'touchstone' against which to test the merits or otherwise of Birmingham group writing; it not only functions as a referential

framework against which to determine the boundaries in the prevailing art/politics debate but also as a barometer of critical tastes during the interwar period.

Contemporary novels of the industrial workplace were, as Chris Baldick indicates, relatively few and far between; works written in the historical interests of the working-class even less so, and more recent critics mourn a missed opportunity here. H. Gustav Klaus regrets the 'empty space' existing due to 'the remarkable absence of novels of factory life, which could have claimed to deal with a situation familiar to and typical of millions of people'. However, he grudgingly concedes that Walter Allen's assessment of *Living* as 'the best English novel of factory life' may have some justification.[29] An equally perplexed Chris Baldick advises that, 'if we look for a convincing fictional treatment of life inside a factory, we have to turn the clock back to the late Twenties and read Henry Green's *Living* (1929).'[30] As does Allen, Baldick praises Green's novel for 'a striking originality that manages to extract from the world of a Birmingham engineering works a melancholy beauty while remaining true to the unglamorous facts of industrial routine.'[31]

That *Living* continues to receive plaudits whilst simultaneously provoking controversy is clear and Walter Allen's periodic re-evaluations of the novel and its author chart his own misconceptions. In his appreciation of Green 'An Artist of the Thirties', *Folios of New Writing* (Spring 1941), Allen claims:

> [*Living*] remains, after twelve years, the best novel of factory life written by an Englishman. It is a remarkable tour-de-force: as a Birmingham man, who spoke with the local accent for the first fifteen years of his life, I can vouch for the accuracy of the dialogue and scene, and as an employee at a foundry I know that the description of the life there and of foundry technique is as correct.[32]

By the time he came to write this, Allen's assumption, 'on the strength of the novel's setting and subject matter,' that '[Green] came from the working-class and had left wing sympathies,' had been duly revised.[33] Noting how the novel's 'subject matter and style gave its author honorary membership, as it were, of a literary movement to which he never really belonged,' Allen hastens to add, 'in the thirties it was the subject matter, life among the factory workers in Birmingham, that gave it its immediate attraction,'[34] That the political zeitgeist of the early thirties would exert a powerful influence upon a working-class novel's critical reception is apparent in the following passage where, recounting his youthful enthusiasms, Allen remarks (perhaps a little guiltily) how one's literary tastes undergo continual re-assessment 'We believed we were interested in politics and in saving the world, fighting for the working class against unemployment, fascism, and the threat of war. And we were quite serious and sincere. But in fact, though we didn't know it, we

were as much swayed by aesthetic considerations.'[35] As the opening sentence of Allen's *New Writing* article makes clear:

> '"The pink decade" the nineteen thirties have recently been christened, but in spite of the sneer, for any writer of the 'thirties to have been non-political, to have aimed at pure art, is in a way itself suspect; and Henry Green is very possibly the only pure artist among the novelists of the thirties'.[36]

Escaping the conventions of the 'over-emphatic naturalism' he considered a flaw in working-class writing, Allen was impressed by Green's ability to capture 'the poetry of working-class life'.[37] This realised in 'a poetry of observation' where incidents such as the Welshman Arthur Jones' impromptu song recital – given to celebrate the birth of his son, or the recurring image of the homing pigeons were 'symbolic at once of escape, of the life beyond the labyrinth of brick, and of the attachment to home and the familiar scene.'[38] The following passages are illustrative here in that they underscore Raymond Williams' view that work and the industrial landscape provide a 'sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in which particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living'.[39] The following passages find Green's narrator depicting his characters' thoughts by using imagery appropriate to their experience within the industrial setting. During Bert Jones and Lily Gates' journey to Liverpool, each articulates secret misgivings; here the novel's homing-pigeon leitmotif serves as an extended metaphor for Lily's mixed emotions:

> For as racing pigeon fly in the sky, always they go round above house which provides for them or, if loosed at a distance from the house then they fly straight there, so her thoughts would not point away long from the house which had provided for her.' […] so Miss Gates, in her thoughts and when these ever threatened to climb up in the air, was always coming bump back again to Mr. Craigan. And again, as when we set off impetuously sometimes then all at once we have to stop as suddenly just how little we are rushing off for becomes apparent to us, so, now first excitement was over, for first time it was plain to her just what she was after. She wanted to better herself and she wanted a kid. (*L* , 348)

Similarly, in the following passage where, unable to establish his parents' whereabouts in the increasingly deprived Liverpool neighbourhoods in which they searched and of which he was becoming increasingly ashamed, it is appropriate that Bert's insecurity and self-doubt concerning his future with Lily is expressed, not in abstract terms, but by reference to the workplace processes with which he was more familiar:

> [H]e had seen it like setting job up on a lathe, the foreman looking on and others in the shop watching him. Job was difficult, he'd been in two minds to begin or not. Now he was alone, lathe had stopped and he was alone. Job was going wrong […] Anything a bit out of the way and he couldn't do it, He blamed himself. What was the good in trying to better yourself when you couldn't hold a better job. Now if he went on with this bit in the lathe he would hopelessly spoil it. […] he couldn't ask her to take on any wife's life in this town, the ordinary kind of life anywhere, when she'd come out to get on in this world. (*L*, 360)

Walter Allen remarked upon the novel's linguistic experimentation considering it 'accurately match[ed] the scene as Green saw it. Bare, repetitive, harsh, angular, sometimes deliberately clumsy, it is an admirable expression for the blackness and din of a foundry, at the same time as it is attuned to the vernacular speech of the characters'.[40] Described by Cunningham as a the nearest anyone got to a 'Worker's Pidgin', a fuller account of the novel's linguistic innovations is provided by Ramon Lopez Ortega who suggests these 'were devised to commit Green's experience of factory life to paper' and therefore represent his '[compulsion] to find the language which would express that first hand [sic] insight into working-class living.'[41] Less an attempt to convey the Birmingham accent phonetically, Green's omission of articles and conjunctions (asyndeton) was made to communicate the sparseness of the proletarian environment and to reflect 'the restricted code usually employed in working-class communication'.[42]

Compared to Allen's and Baldick's effusive and enthusiastic evaluation, Gustav Klaus offers a more tempered assessment, for whilst praising *Living* for 'a number of qualities not always to be found in socialist novels,' he is unable to discern any sense of social responsibility or collective action in the novel and, though conceding that 'in some of its more [lyrical] moments the novel springs to life,' he considers:

> [T]he overall impression one gets of the life of the workers is still one of hopelessness, monotony and lethargy, and it is telling that the more vivid scenes are those that deal with eternal 'timeless' events in the life of this class like conception, pregnancy and birth, whereas there is nothing to suggest that the workers ever take matters into their own hands to improve the harsh conditions under which they live and work. They endure but they never act.[43]

Aware that Green was not a socialist, Gustav Klaus was disappointed to find so little evidence of class-consciousness or collectivity in Green's representation of the workers or the action they take. He suggests their inertia exposes *Living* to the 'kind of reproach Engels made with regard to Margaret Harkness' *City Girl* by '[showing] the working-class figures as a passive mass, unable to help itself and not even [making] any attempt to help itself.'[44] In 'Fictions of Class and

Community in Henry Green's "Living," Marius Hentea mitigates the seeming inertia of Green's foundry workers by suggesting the unconventional, less-confrontational industrial relations existing in some of Birmingham's smaller scale manufacturing units was not a figment of 'Green's bourgeois prejudice' but represented instead his acquaintance with the 'Birmingham way,' the means by which the city avoided traditional large scale corporatism and where industrial mobilization proved difficult due to the large number of migrant workers the city attracted'.[45] As we have noted, Klaus' theory of the novel requires that – irrespective of its author's class and beyond a work's thematic and sociological criteria – a further 'ideological correlate' is necessary to determine the value of a literary work, and this is precisely what the term 'socialist' seeks to comprehend. In what is a distinctly Marxist formulation, Klaus' explains that 'A novel written in the historical interests of the working-class, should reveal a standpoint consistent with the class-conscious sections of that class.'[46] Klaus clearly stipulates political commitment as the gauge by which to measure the value of a working-class text and I shall examine this more fully in the following chapter.

Polarising as they do around artistic means and political ends, the critical assessments cited here encapsulate the opposing positions in a prevailing debate which during the early years of the decade clearly leaned to the political. Contemporary evaluations generally accorded with the opinion of those who found modernism's affectations and experimentation inimical to the kinds of progressive content urged by the Left. Yet, to consider 'realism and experiment as implacably opposed to one another' or that modernist or late-modernist writers had contracted out of society, were inward-looking and socially irresponsible, is, as Andrzej Gasiorek suggests, to adopt the 'simplistic' account of modernism adopted in the post-war period by writers such as C. P. Snow, Kingsley Amis and others who, in advocating a return to realism, were censorious of what they saw as modernism's solipsistic and aesthetic affectation.[47] Lyndsey Stonebridge and Marina MacKay comment on this tendency, attributing the 'polemical separation of the 'referential' and 'aesthetic' largely to the 'legacy of modernist manifesto making itself' [which they consider] 'is not only of doubtful relevance to earlier novelists, but also potentially damaging for those who followed.'[48] Fortunately, as remarked in the introduction, a dialectical approach more accommodating of both positions was slowly beginning to appear.[49] That such 'simplistic accounts' of modernism have proven stubbornly resistant is evident in Carol A. Wipf-Miller's 'Fictions of "Going over": Henry Green and the New Realism,' in which she claims:

> [T]he political shift that earned the thirties the epithet "The Red decade" had its concomitant aesthetic shift as the younger generation of writers "went over," so to speak, from modernism to

> a new realism, from an aesthetic ideal of formal autonomy to one that pursued an active and politicized engagement between life and art.[50]

Wipf-Miller sees this 'new realism' as ditching the aesthetic in favour of a more muscular, politicised discourse. Rather than seeking to overturn traditional thirties orthodoxy, she aims 'not only [to relocate] Green in the context of thirties leftism, but also [to place] these movements in a dialectical relation to the modernist aesthetics and values defined as their antithesis.'[51]

During an interview in which he cited Isherwood's claim that *Living* was the 'best proletarian novel ever written,' Terry Southern asked Henry Green whether he considered the artist or writer should be socially aware, Green responded by saying 'the writer must be disengaged or else he is writing politics. Look at the Soviet writers.'[52] Green's response engages directly with the notion of commitment taken up by H. Gustav Klaus and Theodor Adorno which I discuss in chapter two. Owing to his general distrust of ideologies and lacking the conviction of his contemporaries, Green was not persuaded to press the kind of progressive, political content required of a socially-oriented criticism. Yet, despite such strident a-politicism, it would be mistaken to assume Green was unconcerned with the experience of his co-workers. As J. McAleer indicates '*Living* is a book about how people really live: their hopes, but also their compromises and defeats, and the way those defeats may not be so bad after all. Green neither romanticizes his proletarian characters nor pretends to hold out radical solutions for them.'[53] As Andrzej Gasiorek maintains, it is important not '[to confuse] authorial detachment with authorial disinterestedness.'[54] In a BBC broadcast Green asserted 'we are all individuals and each writer has something to communicate.' [55] That the 'something' Green wished to communicate was of vital, human interest, is evident here, where, following her bad dream, Lily Gates prays for a child:

> Lord give me a child that I might wash him, feed him, give him life. Yes, let him be a boy. Give him blue eyes, let him cling to me with his hands and never be loosed from me. Give him me to love that I'm always kissing him and working for him. I've had nothing of my own. Give him me and let him be mine, oh, oh give me a life to work for, and give me the love of him, and his father's.[56]

Seen from Gustav Klaus' perspective, Green remained unable to adopt a 'standpoint consistent with the class-conscious sections of the working-class' his 'going over' may have implied; he remarks that Green's focus on such 'universal' scenes only serves to 'reinforce the hopelessness of workers' lives'.[57] However, Green believed that for the working class 'Children […] as of course really for every class, are the only creative thing they can do.'[58] Based less upon sentiment or condescension, Green's assertion was congruent with his fundamental belief in the importance

of babies and child-rearing as human activities transcendent of contemporary economic or political concerns. In gesturing to the homely and familial, Green approaches the fascination for 'the continuous flow and recoil of sympathy' and the 'essential process of living' Raymond Williams perceived in the writing of Lawrence.[59]

Perhaps the most significant aspects of Green's writing for our purposes and the one that proved most influential in the work of Birmingham writers Walter Allen and John Hampson were his formal innovations. These are found chiefly in his deployment of cinematic techniques, cross-cutting, cross-class montage and the suppression of the narrative voice, a concomitant of his use of free-indirect speech. Writing to Nevill Coghill, Green explained that *Living* '[is] written in a very condensed kind of way in short paragraphs, hardly ever much longer than 1½ to 2 printed pages & often very much shorter. A kind of very disconnected cinema film.'[60] As we have seen, Documentarism, not in the realist sense of attention to detail, but in the Eisensteinian or Griersonian sense of de-mystification was, in its many shapes and forms, certainly in the ascendant during the pre-war decade. Valentine Cunningham references Green's 'deft cinematic cutting between different people and families, between home and work, between the classes (sweating foundry workers followed for example by Mrs Dupret and her son talking about dances and how tiring they are)'.[61] Lara Feigel considers Green's *Living* 'as startling in its overt cinematic montage as in its sympathy for its working-class protagonists.'[62] However, while 'an enthusiastic cinema fan […] like several 'highbrow' writers, [Green] tended to be more captivated by the popular than the avant-garde, seeking pleasure rather than left-wing enlightenment.'[63]

Unburdened by the sense of guilt and inner conflict assailing those 'attempting', as Stephen Spender expressed it, '[to] cut themselves off from the roots of their own sensibility' in order to align themselves with the more democratic tastes of mass culture', Green's 'Going over' can be seen less as a desire to align himself with the 'working' class than as a bid to escape the arrogance and mundane pre-occupations of his own milieu.[64] In this respect *Living* communicated the sheer joy of Green's escape to new surroundings and experience at the Farringdon works of Pontifex, the family firm in Tyseley, Birmingham, which contrasted with mid-nineteen twenties Oxford he found positively congenial. In a letter informing his mother of his intention to 'come down' prior to completing his final year, Green described the futility of University life in an environment where 'everyone is rich and vapid or poor and vapid & one & all talk about Oxford day and night.'[65] As Wipf-Miller suggests, while retaining the 'return ticket' to his social origins, 'in his work, "Going over" is not an artificial identification with the other; rather, it recovers the *real* self he felt he had lost to the conformity and mass-produced tastes of his own class'.[66] On the publication of *Loving,* which featured a cast of characters redolent of the undergraduates

described here, it would seem that Green had finally redeemed his return ticket. Nevertheless, besides its lyrical passages *Living* presented its author's Auden-like appreciation of the urban industrial, rendering authentically, and, as never before, the lives and aspirations of the workers who inhabited it.

If emulation be considered a form of flattery then Walter Allen's and John Hampson's adoption of the cinematic techniques they discovered in *Living* are fitting testimony to the work of Birmingham's adoptive proletarian. Although Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* is frequently hailed as the most successful, progressive novel in the working-class canon, Green's *Living* represented its polar opposite being the most overtly 'aesthetic' example in the prevailing art/politics binary. By demarcating the boundaries by reference to these two better known works, I hope to have provided a critical framework with which to consider the Birmingham group writers. It is my contention that, in bridging the rhetorical space between story and discourse without compromising their imaginative (aesthetic) potency or political efficacy, the narratives of the Birmingham group will be seen to conform more closely to current theoretical and critical expectations in the discussion of working-class writing.

Following her analysis of *Living*, Lara Feigel's discussion of filmic techniques embarked upon a different path so as to focus on the 'darker side of thirties cinematic writing.'[67] Here, in a world increasingly filmed and photographed and one in which reality itself appears as a simulacrum, she claims that having accepted the cinematic quality of their surroundings, certain thirties writers – notably Christopher Isherwood, Stephen Spender and Edward Upward – began 'to [figure] consciousness itself as a camera or projector,' its 'subjects merely absent actors.'[68] In short, Feigel considers the thirties as pre-figurative of the 'hyperreality' Jean Baudrillard sees as permeating the post-modern condition, whereby, in adopting personae or passively existing as though in a performance, individuals, rather than operating under their own volition, become detached from reality. Feigel argues that the subjective apprehensions expressed in Isherwood's Berlin novels 'work against the hopes for clear-sighted witnessing and political change' wrought by more politically-engaged literary works which adopt the techniques of avant-garde/documentary cinema, to counsel against this surrender to inanition, and, citing Walter Allen's *Blind Man's Ditch,* she suggests that such novels pointedly caution against 'camera consciousness' by underlining the dangers of passively registering or internalising the idealised lives or existence of characters featured in commercial/Hollywood movies.

John Hampson noted that Walter Allen's novels are 'concerned with existence in the thirties', with fascism nearing its apogee while Allen was writing *Blind Man's Ditch,* the

performative abandon his novel cautions against was self-evidently stirring in the darker imaginings of certain European nations. As J. M. Coetzee remarks the 'fascism as theatre' that surfaced in Leni Riefenstahl's films, revealed, somewhat alarmingly, that 'for ordinary Germans, the only identity on show was a fascist identity in fascist costume and fascist postures of domination and obedience'.[69] Allen's novel illustrates Raymond Williams' formulation that artworks provide insights into the contemporary 'structure of feeling' and the following reading of Allen's novel will build on and extend Lara Feigel's discussion by examining a range of characters living in a world soon to encounter the dark shadow of fascism and where the danger of internalising cinematic hyperreality is made glaringly apparent.[70]

Unlike the conventional investigation/denouement crime fictions of Agatha Christie or Dorothy Sayers, Allen's novel is more a 'why-' than 'who-dunnit', the reader's interest generated by speculating on the motives, rather than the identity, of the perpetrator. Enthusiastically adopting Henry Green's way of telling the story 'mainly in very short episodes rather in the manner of a film, the author cutting from character to character, from scene to contrasted scene'. Walter Allen explained his aim was to get the image on the page 'as a film-director might present it'.[71] Cinematic techniques such as cross-cutting, close-up/long shot and cross-class montage proved invaluable in the crafting of Allen's 'closed little communities' and enabled him to present a cinematic and social cross-section of character viewpoints.[72] Following Henry Green, Allen's *Blind Man's Ditch* was largely episodic, though retaining a loose plot structure to trace the sequence of events leading to the opportunistically planned payroll snatch that culminates in a murder. In its recourse to such devices, Allen's novel demonstrates how techniques derived from the cinema came to play an important role in the reconfiguration of the realist novel during this period.

As intimated above, the less beneficent influence of popular cinema, the Hollywood movie in particular, began to attract critical opprobrium and this gathered apace during the decade with cultural commentators of the Left claiming commercial cinema was an ideological tool deployed in the interests of a bourgeois society to lull the masses into a state of comatose inactivity – the lexicon of narcotics was frequently deployed – and impassive credulity. Lara Feigel points out that several of Allen's characters seem 'gripped in a paralysing detachment from external events and from each other.'[73] Here is the epigraph from *Blind Man's Ditch* in which Allen describes the assault towards which his novel inexorably works. Described cinematically the images appear as a projection or shadow play of the events that are detailed later in the story:

> The old man's shadow, spindled and contorted in grotesque parody, moved jerkily along the sun-bloomed surface of the wall. A Green van rattled to a stop and obliterated it. When it emerged again the shadow bobbed up and down as though twitched violently by a string. A second shadow cut across it in mimic assault. It hinged to the ground as though the string had been cut, and decomposed into a pool of blood. (*BM*, 8)

Lara Feigel cites this extract suggesting 'The epigraph gives the murder a cinematographic inevitability. It takes place textually before the characters have decided to enact it, which undermines their volition, suggesting that they are merely fulfilling their automaton-like roles in a pre-determined scene'.[74] Ralph Bond was in no doubt 'the social purpose of the cinema was to act as a drug, for it is just as much propaganda to prevent people thinking as to make them think in certain directions.[75] Feigel references George Orwell's apostrophisation of the working-class cinemagoer 'standing on the street corner, indulging in a private daydream of yourself as Clark Gable or Greta Garbo, which compensates you for a great deal', though elsewhere it seemed Orwell's ire was aimed at the producers of entertainments that held their audiences in such intellectual contempt.[76] Such negative remarks did not remain unchallenged however: recording his visits to the Trocadero at the Elephant and Castle and clearly unperturbed at the prospect of his ideological interpellation, Denis Norden countered '[m]y generation learned how to be human beings from films. You learned how to smoke from films […] you learned how to hold a cigarette […] in a sense everything you learned about being a unit in modern society came from films.'[77] Nevertheless, the notion that audiences or writers might passively internalise the fantasy offerings of a cinematically-mediated world, or may even have preferred to exist in one, was abhorrent to the likes of cultural commentators such as Theodor Adorno who considered this 'the worst kind of bourgeois sadism,' – if only for the simple reason that in a communist society work will be organised in such a way that people will no longer be so tired and so stultified that they need distractions.'[78]

As in medicine, it is necessary to determine the cause before considering the cure. That people wished to escape the drudgery of work or quotidian anxieties was not unreasonable. However, an existential disquiet of a darker tenor had begun to permeate the collective conscience. In *British Writers and the Approach of World War II,* Steve Ellis explains that, sandwiched between economic depression and imminent world war, expressions of a deeper concern had become manifest in a 'literature of anxiety.' Referencing the almost forgotten genre of the 'Munich crisis novel,' Ellis describes how the Edwardian writers Shaw, Wells and Woolf each registered and responded to the sense of catastrophe pervading E. M. Forster's essay 'The 1939 state' which, as its punning title implies, described the neurosis currently assailing both the

national and individual psyche.[79] Published in November 1939, five months after Forster's essay, Allen's novel provides a detailed account of individuals living under the shadow of potentially apocalyptic events and urges collective engagement by challenging the disabling detachment engendered by the palliative effects of commercial cinema.

The novel's title may derive from the biblical reference (Matthew 15:14), 'Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch', a biblical idiom which illustrates Allen's pairing of the spiritually-blind, con-man character James Bartholomew and his enticement of the depressed and rudderless Eugene Lorimer into committing a criminal act. Conversely, it may relate to the fates of Eugene Lorimer and Workers Educational Association instructor Ronald Anderson, in their attempts to woo the proud and independent Rosamund Miller – an activity at best misguided as W. B. Yeats indicates in 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul':

> I am content to live it all again
> And yet again, if it be life to pitch
> Into the frog spawn of a Blind Man's Ditch,
> A blind man battering blind men;
> Or into that most fecund ditch of all,
> The folly that man does
> Or must suffer, if he woos
> A proud woman not kindred to his soul.
>
> W. B. Yeats. Stanza 3, Part II. *A Dialogue of Self and Soul.* Part II. Stanza 3.[80]

We first encounter English literature tutor Ronald Anderson at the Workers' Educational Association class he teaches one evening each week. By day Anderson is a schoolmaster at King James Grammar School, a position secured following the break-down of a previous relationship which ended in his partner's suicide.[81] Having once entertained literary ambitions, in a moment of maudlin reflection Anderson asks himself: 'why had not his teachers when lecturing on great literature not warned him: 'My dear boy this is beautiful and profound; but do not think it is life' (*BM*, 151). Diffident regarding his school-mastering abilities, he considers himself better suited to tutoring the night school class attended by the idealistic Eugene Lorimer who initially appears as his protégé: an echo of his former self.

Eugene Lorimer works as a maintenance electrician but is studying literature in order to 'improve' and ultimately to divest himself of an occupation he loathes. In this he follows the well-trodden path of the working-class auto-didact which, in the context of this discussion, leads from

Hardy's Jude Fawley, to Jack London's Martin Eden along to E. M. Forster's Leonard Bast and on to Arthur Gardner, the protagonist of Walter Brierley's *Sandwichman.* The discussion of Eugene's educational aspirations here pre-empts the exploration of self-cultivation I develop more fully in Chapter three and highlights the overlapping and inevitable cross-over of themes encountered when structuring a thesis intersectionally. Allen's characterisation of Eugene diverges from standard treatments of the working-class auto-didact for, as intimated in Ronald Anderson's misgivings above, Walter Allen was himself not without reservations regarding the benefits of cultural-improvement and of lives lived vicariously through literature or film.

Beyond their acquaintance at night school, the lives of Ronald Anderson and Eugene Lorimer also converge in their relationship with Rosamund Miller, the career-minded journalist employed by the local paper, who owns her own apartment, and who, for the 1930s, supplies a convincing portrait of the independent, self-possessed woman. Unfortunately, as in Yeats' poem, each character's relationship with her founders in the blind man's ditch of their 'folly.' Ronald Anderson being older and the more emotionally resilient finds another partner and eventually adjusts to a less elevated version of his youthful imaginings by settling to his career as a schoolmaster. Whereas, mourning the termination of his relationship with Rosamund, Eugene Lorimer suffers a breakdown. This renders him susceptible to the criminal machinations of the morally-vacuous, con-man James Bartholomew. The latter manipulates Eugene into committing the assault on Mr. Overs an elderly war veteran who later dies of his injuries. Allen's 'closed little community' is also populated by other characters whose lives are montaged against the delusional, constructed personae of his principal protagonists. However, it is in probing beneath the 'trim undistinguished façade which a provincial town presents to a stranger' and exploring the socially-submerged sections of the community that Allen's novel moves beyond conventional conceptions of the crime novel.

The following passage finds Eugene Lorimer performing his duties on the Saturday morning nearing the end of the working-week. Having been called to the workbench of 'Snowball', a co-worker who, reluctant to over-exert himself so near finishing time, claims his machine is malfunctioning, Eugene quickly traces the 'fault':

> "How long's this saw been in?" he asked.
>
> Snowball sprang to his feet, took his hands out of his pockets. "Christ Almighty!" he said, "I put it in new last week. There ain't nothing wrong with the saw."
>
> "No, and there, ain't nothing wrong with the motor or the starter either," retorted Eugene. "You mustn't half have been, busy, mate, if you only put that saw in last week." He put his pliers and screwdriver back in his pocket.

> "Trying to be funny, ain't you?" Snowball said. The threat was automatic and meaningless. Bloody hell! He'd have to put a new one in himself after all, and he'd been hoping to get enough power out of the motor to carry him over until Monday. But he was a philosophic young man. Might as well get it done. He stood with head on one side for a moment, looking at the saw. Then he began to sing softly to himself and set to work. *(BM*, 48)

Despite his scepticism concerning Snowball's claims, Eugene's attitude to work is no less cynical. Before reporting back to the electrician's shop and with just fifty minutes before 'knocking-off time' he decides to have 'two drags and a spit' and cautiously makes his way to the lavatories. 'You had to be careful,' Allen's narrator informs us 'The doors to the WC were half doors only, reaching from knee to shoulder; and they had no bolts. It was dangerous because the foremen used the same conveniences'. (*BM*, 48) On entering the cubicle Eugene sits down with half a Woodbine cupped in the palm of his hand, 'A surreptitious cigarette was one of the good things, and a few puffs in the lavatory tasted better than any number any other time'. (*BM*, 49)

This extract again finds Allen following Henry Green in using cross-cutting techniques to present what Chris Baldick describes as 'the unglamorous facts of industrial routine,' and in revealing the quotidian nature of factory work and workers' attitudes to it. By juxtaposing or cinematically montaging the figures of Eugene and Snowball, Allen begins to shape their individual identities. Despite their differing status within the factory hierarchy, each views his occupation as merely instrumental: solely a means to extrinsic satisfactions, their mutual indifference and alienation registered in the petty acts of micro-resistance described here. Outside the workplace Eugene aspires to intellectual advancement via his pursuit of literature and the arts, whereas Snowball spends his earnings on football and Max Miller. Recounting Snowball's suggestion that Eugene accompany him to see Max Miller at the Hippodrome, Eugene apostrophises 'Max Miller indeed!' following which Allen's narrator provides a left-handed compliment, 'He pitied Snowball, was priggishly sorry for him'. (*BM*, 49) Eugene's condescension derives from his academic pretensions, though again, as the narrator cautions, 'If he did not realise them the future would be unbearable, life not worth living. […] But the knowledge of his ambition isolated him. To achieve it, it was necessary to cut himself away from everything he had been associated with'. (*BM*, 33) Eugene's intellectual aspirations illustrate the 'shame dynamic' Pamela Fox perceives in working-class culture, in which narrative description functions as a form of 'resistance' expressing individual needs and desires, *distinct* from trade unionism, labourism or *master narratives* exhorting a more organised or collective agenda (my emphasis).[82] Fox conceptualises working-class fiction as a 'playing-out' of the shame dynamic operating in working-class experience and her views are central to the arguments relating to the educational

aspirations of the working-class characters and authors discussed in this thesis. Eugene's desire for knowledge and his idealisation of learning are each outputs of the shame dynamic Fox describes, and although seeing desire as a pattern of resistance based upon a perceived 'lack' or sense of disadvantage, Fox is aware of its negative aspects, she cites T. A. (Tommy) Jackson warning against the ideological dangers of reading the canonical texts of English literature: the 'Best Books' as recommended by his Working Men's College instructor, believing they accomplished assimilation rather than class awareness:

> Insensibly, preoccupation with these 'classics' treated as a single category – the Best – caused a student to slip into regarding Culture as a fixed Mind-world in which one either ascended with the geniuses to supreme heights or sank with the dullards and the dunces to the uncultured slime … one acquired a complete detachment from – if not downright contempt for – the 'uncultured' vulgarity and sordidiness of everyday life. [83]

Such embourgeoisification writ large may have troubled Walter Allen. Born into the working class and, as his sympathetic characterisations testify, sharing a thoroughgoing allegiance to and understanding of it, his early novels occasionally betray a regret that his education and literary aspirations had set him on a trajectory away from his cultural origin. Allen was fortunately grounded enough to self-correct in this respect, however, it is precisely against entering a world of literary or cinematic abstraction and severing one's links to reality that his novel cautions.

Cutting from Eugene's clandestine cigarette musings to the office of 'Woman's Editor' at the 'Daily Herald and Evening Star,' we first encounter Rosamund adding the finishing touches to the 'Women's Interests' column. It is appropriate that Rosamund occupies the position of Women's Editor, she is proficient in her work and clearly derives intrinsic satisfaction from it, being, one may presume, well-remunerated, she is able to enjoy such material comforts as the thirties might offer in the form of a luxury apartment, a telephone and independence. However, Rosamund appears to have internalised her job title to the extent that in the public sphere she presents almost as an edited version of herself. Following the breakdown of her relationship with the married features editor of a northern daily, she has moved to the Midlands in order to pick up the emotional pieces and begin life afresh. A competent professional whose self-worth is defined by her position, Rosamund nevertheless finds life on a provincial paper boring, tired of filling copy space with syndicated agency features, she dreams of a scoop. As with Eugene, she seems detached from the quotidian and exists in an emotionally disconnected world of her own imaginings. Gazing down at the teeming life in the street below her office, she speculates detachedly on the meanings of people's expressions and movements. Lara Feigel observes, that in

viewing reality as though watching a film '[Rosamund] bemoans her own, apparently inevitable disengagement from the scene.'[84] Despite this Garbo-like persona, she more closely resembles Henry Green's Lily Gates. Allen's narrator confides her inner doubts:

> [F]or a moment she wished passionately that she could experience everything, thinking: I have sacrificed too much. She wanted for a moment to have her job, her independence, a man and a child and all at one time. But it was impossible; to have independence you must sacrifice all the other things. You could have men, but not one man; lovers, but not a lover. She did not dare ask herself whether the sacrifice was too great. (*BM*, 246)

It is prior to a performance of Shaw's *Arms and the Man* at the 'Little Theatre' that Rosamund first observes the self-conscious Eugene Lorimer desperately, not to say pretentiously, clutching his copy of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria,* and determines to enliven the tedium of her existence by adopting him as temporary amusement and distraction. It is apposite that Rosamund should pick one so involved in his own self-creation. Allen montages her inner thoughts with those of Eugene who is at this point reflecting, somewhat phenomenologically, upon how his own 'performance' might be critically received:

> In the balcony of the Little he felt very much alone, but besides being envious and fearful he was proud. Sitting there, waiting to see a performance of *Arms and the Man,* reading the *Biographia Literaria* half-comprehendingly as in a foreign language during the overture, was a symbol of himself and of the ambition that he thought of as himself; what made him proud was not so much reading Coleridge, watching Shaw, as the *sensation* of reading Coleridge and watching Shaw (my emphasis). (*BM*, 63)

On first setting eyes upon Rosamund, Eugene feels he dislikes her intensely:

> She was remote from anything in his experience. Out of memories of Hollywood films he built up a background for her, of chromium furniture, green glass-topped tables […] against which she stood, posed elegantly with a frost-green glass in her hand, a figure seen in a slick film or advertisement in the expensive weeklies you glanced at from time to time in the reading-room of the public library. (*BM*, 64-65).

It was 'as though he had walked into a cinema and seen himself upon the screen with Rosamund'. (*BM*, 112) Lara Feigel observes how Eugene 'figures her […] as a Hollywood character, 'a figure seen in a slick film or in an advertisement in the expensive shiny weeklies that you glanced at

from time to time in the reading room at the public library'. (*BM*, 65) As Allen's, knowing and world-weary narrator explains: '[Eugene's] relationship with Rosamund, […] was like something in a book. And this thrilled him, because life in books seemed finer to him and more real than actuality. He was in love with art and abstractions'. (*BM*, 138) That people consciously engage in their identity construction was discomfiting to Allen who, like T. A. Jackson, whilst a lover of cinema and the arts, worries that filmic emulation or living one's 'life in books' can prove destructive. Eugene's love of art and abstractions parallels that of the younger Ronald Anderson although the latter had at least retained a residue of self-knowledge. Again the use of montage enables Allen to juxtapose Eugene's fantasy projection of Rosamund with the groundedness and down-to-earth perspectives embodied in his mother:

> She frowned, threading a needle. The Sunday paper lay beside her in her chair, but she had not read it. Later she would look at the back page of pictures and tut-tut the bathing girls. […] but work was her drug; she felt guilty if her hands were not busy [...] she had come to accept life as that; work always, standing over a hot stove, blackleading a grate, washing clothes, ironing, back-aching work; [...] work that made the eyes ache. She complained of the work continually but in it she found her chief pleasure. (*BM*, 113, 4).

Contrasted with the independent Rosamund, Eugene's mother is enslaved to that prevailing domestic convention: the woman's lot. Montaged against photos of bathing girls in the Sunday paper, Allen's narrator tells us that '[s]he had let her hair grow and kept it in place with myriad hairpins though she refused to have it cut, 'Me go to a hairdresser at my age!' She found the notion utterly incredible. 'Besides your dad wouldn't like it'. (*BM*, 26)

Following the affair with Rosamund in which she has become bored and not a little alarmed at his impetuosity, Eugene falls in with the petty crook James Bartholomew. A spiv, prey, as with other characters in the novel, to cinematic fantasies, he craves money and the life he imagines it will facilitate and is prepared to engage in criminal activity to achieve it. Having returned home following an unexplained absence of three years, Bartholomew is already feverishly planning a further crime. Like other characters in the novel, he finds it difficult to distinguish between the real and the imagined. We initially meet him at his old school where a long-serving master is due to participate in a retirement presentation. In a sequence mirroring Eugene Lorimer's self-conscious imaginings, Bartholomew prepares his 'role' at the event. For this 'performance' he has re-invented himself as a British volunteer invalided out of active service in the Spanish Civil War and, to add a little dramatic gravitas to his deception, has cultivated a limp. 'Limping expertly into the school, James Bartholomew watched himself limp expertly into

school.' Allen makes Bartholomew's calculated dissimulation authentic by relating it in the third person, as though he were regarding himself from the perspective of an observer 'an impressive figure, the more distinguished because of the limp and the stick he leaned on; an ambassador perhaps, with a medal on a gold chain at his chest like the man in the De Reske advertisement'. (*BM*, 66) Bartholomew's preposterous self-construction draws upon cinematic representations of the heroic type: 'But Bartholomew was enjoying himself. He was doing an act'. (*BM*, 68). Allen's juxtaposition of characters continues later when Allen contrasts Bartholomew, the deceitful, work-shy con-man, with his moral nemesis Mr. Overs the be-medalled WWI veteran whose integrity he impugns 'Bartholomew did not know when he had hated a man so passionately. His old soldier's incorruptibility was an affront to him'. (*BM*, 148)

Eugene's Lorimer's unassuming brother Harry proves the exception to 'the paralysing detachment' in which so many of the novel's characters appear gripped. Wearing his blue, sand-stained labourer's overalls and attempting to catch a few moments sleep following a wearying shift at the foundry where he is employed, Harry belies his labourer's status being sensitive, intelligent and politically radical. When the family retire to bed, he remains downstairs listening to a gramophone recording of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. During a domestic altercation in which Eugene asserts he no longer intends to attend Sunday school, Harry interjects on his behalf proposing he accompany him to the town hall instead, 'You come and hear Clem Atlee, our kid!' Just as such existential renderings of family life and their author's fascination with 'the continuous flow and recoil of sympathy' had found expression in D. H. Lawrence's works, so too in Allen's multi-protagonist novels which not only depict families locked in noisy disagreement but also shape intra-class conflicts by offering differing perspectives. Following a political meeting and evening session spent addressing publicity envelopes on behalf of the Labour candidate, Harry has returned home and settled to his supper. Harry's sister Alice and her fiancée Phil wait politely at the table while Harry finishes his meal. Phil, a small-time entrepreneur who fancies himself a wit, winks conspiratorially at Harry's sister and proceeds to ask Harry about the meeting. 'Barely able to conceal his enthusiasm,' the ingenuous Harry recounted 'what Mr. Attlee and Miss Wilkinson had said, how they had defied Hitler, Mussolini, General Franco, and the National Government […] "It was great", he said at the end'. (*BM*, 114) Following Harry's enthusiastic account, Allen focalises his disingenuous interlocutor who:

> [S]lick with Clark Gable moustache, sporting in plus fours, stifled a yawn. He was bored. Spain meant nothing to him: he had Alice and his sports car. He regarded Harry with good-humoured contempt: he was only a labourer after all, and Phil had small sympathy with labourers. He was in

> authority, boss over a score of girls. It had pleased him to condescend to Alice. He saw himself as an employer of labour. (*BM*, 115)

Winking at Alice, Phil goads Harry scoffing, 'What we want in this country is a Hitler!' Harry is dumbstruck, shaken with anger he rises violently from the table shouting, 'I ain't eating my supper with any bleeding fascist!' and proceeds to leave the house slamming the front door behind him. Later we find Harry alone in a crowded pub disconsolately remonstrating with himself and brooding over Phil's deliberate provocation. Unlike Eugene, Harry is disinclined towards academic attainment and content to work as a labourer. Nevertheless, as we have seen he takes an active interest in politics and has an innate sense of social justice. Yet, as his outburst at the insensitive and politically-vacuous Phil reveals, Harry regrets his inarticulacy 'The trouble is, I got no education, he thought. He was suddenly sad. I got a vote, that's all'. (*BM*, 120) He recalls with bitter satisfaction how in a previous employment the owner of the firm chaired a meeting at which the local Conservative candidate was to speak. His boss explained this would provide the candidate with an opportunity to address the workers man-to-man, following which they would be 'permitted' to ask questions. Lacking confidence and unsure quite how to frame his words, Harry is repeatedly prompted by his increasingly impatient boss. Finally, in a spirit of sincere and innocent inquiry Harry speaks up 'I'd like to ask why you pay your workers less than Union rates?'. (*BM*, 123) Having taken up the foreman's instruction to collect his cards the following day, Harry had remained unemployed for the following six months. Yet, as Allen's narrator explains: '[For Harry] the memory was a touchstone and a talisman. It comforted him. For a minute at that meeting it had been as though a bomb had exploded; and he had thrown it. For a minute reality had broken through'. (*BM*, 123) Despite his inarticulacy and political naïvety, Harry Lorimer expresses the sense of social responsibility and collective will that H. Gustav Klaus sought but was unable to discover in the workers depicted by Henry Green in *Living*. In a novel peopled by characters locked in the realm of their filmic imaginings and in the passivity evident in their 'paralysing detachment from external events', Harry Lorimer's groundedness provided the still centre in a cinematically-mediated world.

Blind Man's Ditch was completed in midsummer 1939, by which time its author, encouraged by the publication though meagre proceeds from the sale of *Innocence is Drowned* the previous year, was now living frugally in London. In his autobiographical memoir, Allen describes receiving a telephone call from Louis MacNeice in which the poet, clearly presenting with symptoms of the '1939 state,' informed Allen war was imminent and, having sold his car for £14, suggested they spend the proceeds on lunch at the Café Royal. Having recently completed a novel cautioning against the internalisation of cinematically-mediated reality, it was ironic,

though, given the circumstances, not unreasonable, that 'floating on Brandy and cigar fumes' Allen and MacNeice should seek temporary respite by taking a taxi to the Tottenham Court Road, where a cinema was showing one of their favourite Westerns.[85]

Walter Allen and John Hampson each set out to re-configure the traditional realist novel by recourse to the technical repertoire of documentary film. Allen's receptiveness to formal experimentation, registered obliquely his dissatisfaction with traditional realism and sets his work apart from that of fellow Birmingham group writer Leslie Halward who, rather than re-configuring the traditional mode, found its more extreme variant in a naturalism quite adequate to his purposes. Walter Allen distinguishes between the English and French forms of naturalism explaining that 'the French were interested in character as an instance of general laws that can be deduced from it, but for the English character tends to be an end in itself, which is to say that whereas the French write as moralists the English write as humorists'. [86] Halward's 'English' naturalism certainly accords with this aspect of Allen's distinction, although his in-depth portraits challenge Allen's view that naturalists 'turned away from psychological analysis'. On the contrary, Halward's naturalism explored the psychological motivations of his characters while retaining a searching objectivity uncontaminated by authorial hand-wringing or what Storm Jameson termed the 'distorting gloss of the *writer's* emotions and self-questionings.[87] Halward explained his position by reference to his mentor Chekhov in a talk given to the Birmingham Booklovers' Society:

> YOU, may weep and moan over your stories,' he said in one letter, 'You may shed as many tears as you like, but your pen must shed nothing but ink.' And again, 'If you drop a tear you will strip the subject of it's [sic] severity and of everything worthy of attention in it. […] When the good writer wants to make you sad, he does so by being as matter of fact as if he were telling you that the hero was lighting a cigarette'.[88]

He continued, '[t]hat seems to me to be the secret – to write *as if* you'd been a witness and were quite unaffected by the affair, and *not as if* you were heartbroken because of what happened' (my emphasis).[89] Halward's workplace narratives not only 'move us', to parapharase E. P. Thompson, 'from dry statistic to way of life', but they also move us affectively for, if we seek an immersive account of what it was actually like to experience manual work from the perspective of the individual engaged in it, then it is to Halward we must turn. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to 'Belcher's Hod', his character study of an ageing bricklayer's labourer on one of Birmingham's myriad pre-war building sites.

The modern short-story tradition in which plotless stories and the adoption of 'less mechanical versions of the surprise ending or twist-in-the-tail effect' that occupied the minds of popular 'magazine freelances' exerted a powerful influence on working-class writing during this period; for as Christopher Hilliard observes, 'it is a tradition that has largely been ignored in critical discussions of thirties writing, in part because of the attention paid to the influence of the documentary forms.'[90] The fact that the short story merited consideration beyond its function as a *divertissement* is evident from critical discussion. In *The Modern Short Story: From 1809 – 1953,* H. E. Bates champions the genre in its own right, rather than as a diminutive 'doll's-house' version, sketch, or trial run for its more expansive cousin the novel. In the chapter 'Lawrence and the Writers of To-day,' Bates praises Halward along with other exponents of the modern [Chekhovian] form such as V. S. Pritchett, Elizabeth Bowen, and Arthur Calder-Marshall, who, in his opinion, formed 'the backbone of the English short-story today'.[91] Identifying his milieu as 'bricklayers, plasterers, love in the front room, and the Saturday football match in Birmingham,' Bates believed Halward had broken with the stereotyped tradition of the artificially plotted short-story and imbued the modern form not only with his own individual qualities but also 'the realism and poetry it had sadly lacked.'[92] Bates' views were echoed by Edward J. O'Brien in the introduction to Halward's *To Tea on Sunday* (1936). While registering the achievement of his Birmingham group companions, it was upon Halward that O'Brien lavished his most effusive praise. Commending Halward's technical mastery, objectivity, lack of sentimentalisation and 'the most self-sacrificing elimination of incidental beauties and irrelevant perceptions,' he placed the Birmingham writer on a par with Katherine Mansfield 'the only other English author of our time who was capable of this continuous self-denial.'[93] The comic element in Halward's stories would doubtless have appealed to Margaret Storm Jameson who believed it was essential to 'get some fun out of it (writing). Nothing is less to our taste than the inspissated gloom of naturalism. A novel by Ignazio Silone, *Fontamara,* offers itself as a model – this tragic bitter story of a village is extremely funny, and sticks faster in the memory by it.'[94] Turning to the working-class characters who populate Halward's anthology *To Tea on Sunday,* O'Brien explains its author is uninhibited by the trepidation which, unlike their American counterparts, makes contemporary English authors and poets reluctant to engage in any 'spontaneous social contact outside their own class'. 'As I have said on another occasion, the first lesson the English short-story writer needs to learn is that life is never in bad taste. Once that discovery has been made by a writer his art will not be in bad taste.'[95]

As we have seen, while eschewing a directly propagandist stance or ideological critique, Henry Green and Walter Allen presented an implicit though powerful indictment of the

dominant ideology by means of their formal innovation. Neither 'genre resistant' nor, despite an at times chauvinistic protectiveness regarding 'his people', overtly political, Halward's short narratives are far from ideologically benign. By virtue of their subject matter alone, they support Raymond Williams' view that 'in the simple act of being written, working-class texts operate as 'a significant and positive cultural intervention'.[96] As touched upon in the discussion of Storm Jameson's 'soundings', by providing a glimpse of the lives of individuals existing beneath the surface of contemporary bourgeois society, and describing representative aspects of a discrete social grouping, Halward's project aligns with that of Lawrence Stone, who advocated a historiography constructed from narrative accounts. Indicating that imaginative writing 'is organised chronologically; is focused on a single coherent story; is *descriptive* rather than *analytical*; is concerned with people not abstract circumstances; and deals with the particular and the specific rather than the collective and statistical' (my emphasis), Stone is defining the rationale of the branch of historical analysis he termed prosopography, which, as he continues, 'seeks to create lists of biographical notes, covering both the political elite and [importantly] "lesser mortals".[97] Stone's belief in the qualitative potential of imaginative writing parallels that of E. P. Thompson and likewise, as we shall see in the following chapter, the work of historian H. L. Beales and broadcaster R. S. Lambert who placed a higher value on qualitative information rather than statistical data alone.

The feelings of respect, anxiety, self-defeat, and disappointment which surface in Halward's stories are illustrative of the strikingly-powerful counterforce of 'Class Shame' that Pamela Fox finds in both working-class writers and their narrative depictions. Conventionally received as either 'straightforward political tracts' or, more recently, as 'examples of a marginalised, radical discourse suppressed by dominant culture,' Fox addresses 'another, equally important, dynamic at work: the encoding of dominant desires and gestures in narratives governed by a restrictive model of class-conscious politics and writing.'[98] Though not included in her survey, Leslie Halward's narratives provide an opportunity to examine the 'reproduction-resistance circuit' which Fox considers 'suggest[s] ways in which shame (beyond being a liability) might function as a resource in working-class culture and literary practice' and with which she attempts to relocate working-class writers and their narratives in a cultural middle-ground between individual agency and bourgeois emulation.[99] Her intervention is relevant to the arguments presented here, for 'working-class texts' often frustrate the 'usually well-intentioned' expectations of Marxist theorising and critical perspectives seeking 'oppositional strategies,' or likewise workerist or sectarian critiques which 'categorically condemn the reproduction of dominant values and celebrate 'counter hegemonic' acts'.[100] Fox argues that class shame presents

as 'a particular stance of 'resistance theory' operating 'as a class tool and survival strategy [that] 'competes with more militant discourse to shape the presentation of working-class experience.'[101] Repudiating conceptions of social and cultural production developed by intellectuals such as Althusser, Bourdieu and others, she urges readers and critics of working-class literature to follow Paul Willis who, while respecting their aims, questions 'the astonishingly pervasive power' these theorists attribute to the 'dominant culture' which, whether in the ideological apparatus of education or family 'fails to allow for the possibility of momentary awareness and opposition among students, children, and workers.'[102] According to Fox, such failure 'posits a hopelessly abstract, static model of social relations that Willis claims 'cannot account for specific, lived 'struggle and contestation', […] 'the field of a creative, collective self-making in the subordinate class'.[103]

Leslie Halward's various employments as toolmaker, die-sinker, bricklayer and plasterer and his leisure pursuits including cinema-going, a spell as a dance-band drummer and bouts as an amateur boxer all attest to his working-class lineage. Despite Valentine Cunningham's difficulty in assessing whether, as the son of a pork butcher, Halward might 'really' be considered working-class, Walter Allen had no such qualms considering Halward:

> [P]ure Brummie, speaking no other tongue than the Birmingham accent, the product of working-class Birmingham […] At first glance he struck you as sullen, from the combination, I think, of his accent, the seemingly unhealthy urban pallor of his skin, and a broken nose he had acquired as an amateur boxer.[104]

As Edward J. O'Brien records, for a brief period during the thirties Halward's star was in the ascendant. That this was possibly an output of the intellectual fetishisation of working-class writing which, for a short time, captured the imagination of middle-class readers and publishers eager to satisfy their appetites, is touched on below by Walter Allen, who, commenting upon Halward's two published collections of short stories claims:

> [T]he stories of working-class life collected in *To Tea on Sunday* and *The Money's All Right* seem to me without rival in British English. For a few years in the Thirties, [Halward] was naturally and properly much admired. He was thought of, of course, as a proletarian writer, but I am sure that meant nothing to him. He was as unpolitical man as I have ever met, as much likely, I think, to vote Conservative as Labour.[105]

Allen's comments touch upon issues raised in the introduction regarding those best qualified to write about working-class experience and whether accounts of working-class life should be ideologically prescriptive. As we have seen, whilst eschewing any progressive, political

content, Henry Green's modernist, 'outsider' depiction of the urban-industrial excited a mixed though largely affirmative critical response. Yet, although Halward undoubtedly possessed the appropriate working-class credentials, he remained as apolitical as Green. However, the disadvantages hinted at by Walter Allen resonate with Roy Johnson's not wholly unjustified observation that 'the probable lack of aesthetic education […] will militate against [working-class writers] developing the skills necessary to transcend bourgeois aesthetic values'.[106] Undeterred however, Halward's, chauvinistic 'class-pride', as distinct from 'class-consciousness', combined with his love of Chekhov, whose works he sought, read and emulated, drove him to pursue self-expression through literature. He describes his 'calling' in *Let Me Tell You*: 'The stories I liked best and tried to improve were those about my own people, the working-class. Now I was getting somewhere. I knew what I wanted to write.'[107] As Christopher Hilliard observes, Halward's aim 'to write in [his] own language about [his] own people' was little short of a vocation. Hilliard addresses the idea that working-class writers viewed themselves as 'spokesmen' or 'representatives' of their social class by suggesting, in somewhat biblical terms, that 'the transforming power of a revealed truth shaped a variety of events and movements during the interwar period' and he asserts that, just as those volunteering as Mass-Observers, or participating in Hunger Marches brought 'incontrovertible, breathing evidence of deprivation into the heart of prosperous towns and cities, *committing the experience of the poor and unemployed to print was a gesture toward the same end* (my emphasis).'[108] Citing Walter Allen's assertion that Halward was 'the most unpolitical man he [had] ever met,' Hilliard explains:

> The spokesman role that working-class writers adopted was not shaped exclusively by the politics of poverty and unemployment, but also by an impulse to present rounded, humane pictures of "their people." To write a story that accurately portrayed working-class life was an act of self-respect and community service. It was a point where the two meanings of "representation" coincide.[109]

Prompted by his abhorrence of class 'outsiders,' Halward exercised a protective, at times, obsessive desire to conceal 'his people' from the gaze of predatory anthropologists, mass-observers, politicians and others whose accounts of working-class experience merely derived from 'casual contact and occasional eavesdropping.' In a talk given at Fircroft College, he stressed that 'the most important of the qualifications required by those who write about the working-class, […] is that they be *members* of that class' (my emphasis).[110] He cautioned those intending to write about 'his people' against adopting a superior or condescending tone, whereupon, he launched into the following broadside on the debilitating effects of education:

> Another cause of this superiority complex is education. Here of course I'm bearding a number of Lions in their den. But I'm convinced of the truth of this statement. I'm quite sure that the worst thing that could happen to a young working-class man who, possessing natural talent and a desire to write about his people but not as yet the ability to express himself — the worst thing that could happen to such a young man is that he be sent to College or to a University. Once such a person gets "education" into his system, becomes a student and has a taste of culture all is lost.[111]

Despite this robust condemnation of tertiary education, Halward was nevertheless eager to reference the encouragement he received from none other than Ivor Evans, Professor of English Literature at Queen Mary College, University of London.[112]

Derived from Halward's experience working on the construction sites of 1930s Birmingham, 'Belcher's Hod' is described as 'a minor masterpiece,' by Paul Lester and as 'a subtle story enshrined in the form of an anecdote,' by Walter Allen, though each consider some deeper significance may attach, both read the story as a 'bigger they come, harder they fall' parable. E. M. Forster praised the story's economy of means, objectivity and Halward's 'ability to write from within' and 'make his class come alive'.[113] Such considerations overlook aspects of the story that relate to the more complex questions relating to working-class subjectivity as encoded in Pamela Fox's *reproduction-resistance circuit* mentioned above. We encountered elements of 'micro-resistance' in the discussion of Walter Allen's *Blind Man's Ditch* and will revisit them in the discussion of Brierley's *Means Test Man* in the following chapter. However, Walter Allen's suspicion that, his brusqueness aside, Halward was possibly fearful of life outside the working-class, ties in with Pamela Fox's claim that a 'shame dynamic' operates as 'cultural 'static' in working-class experience. Manifest in a sense of lack and disadvantage, this affects not only the life experience of working people but also working-class authors, eventually finding an outlet and surfacing in their narratives. Notions of reputation and shame abound in Halward's short story which, despite its brevity, proves particularly responsive to the implications of Fox's theory.

> Everybody in the building trade knew or had heard of Jim Belcher. Belcher was a plasterer's labourer, a great barge of a man who gloried in his own strength and boasted of the beer he could drink. He was about fifty and had been in the building trade all his life. He knew his job. He had worked with master craftsmen, gauging the stuff for them to use, cleaning each tool for them as they put it down, in the days when work was done leisurely and well. For six months now he had been working on an estate where the houses, every one alike, were thrown up overnight and the plaster slapped on the walls, he said he believed, with a shovel. (*BH*, 1)

Here, presented with a minimum of fuss, is Jim Belcher. We're told Jim constructed his own 'hod' – a 'V' shaped, box-like container mounted on a long wooden pole designed for the building labourer to carry bricks, mortar or plaster mix to the 'trades', the skilled workers: bricklayers, joiners and plasterers employed on the building site. As befitting his own 'barge-like' proportions, Jim's giant hod was something of talking point:

> It was an immense size. He had made it himself and had painted the outside a brilliant green. He was very proud of his hod. 'It takes a man,' he would say, 'to carry that.' He carried it, full of wet floating, with superb ease. He would let nobody else use his hod or even touch it. Every night before he knocked off he washed it and dried it with rags as carefully as if it were made of gold. (*BH*, 2)

Having sketched in Jim's credentials and those of the hod by which he is symbolised, Halward's exposition effectively ends, Jim's self-assurance, powerful physique and magnificent hod having coalesced in the intense sense of pride and self-regard that constitute his workplace reputation. Coming so early in the story, this catalogue of attributes effectively sets him up for his inevitable fall. However, the following reading will argue Jim's fate is more 'problematic' than 'proverbial'.

Following an evening of excessive drinking at a local public house, Jim is carried home by a gang of his workplace companions, whereupon his wife leaves him downstairs to sleep on the sofa. During the night Jim is nauseous and vomits in the sink, despite which, waking at five the following morning and still feeling the worse for wear, he sets off once more to work. On arriving at the building site he asks the foreman if he can be 'signed-off' for half-an-hour at lunchtime to 'wet his whistle' – in drinkers' parlance: 'a hair of the dog'. Following his 'medicinal' pint he encounters Charlie Tull, an old drinking companion, and inevitably further drinks ensue. Several pints later, apropos of nothing, Jim turns to Charlie. 'My daughter,' he informs his semi-inebriated interlocutor, 'is a whore.' Seemingly nonplussed, possibly on account of the alcohol consumed, Tull merely nods in acknowledgement. Jim continues: 'She went to Liverpool with a bloke,' Tull nods again, 'He was married', says Jim. (*BH*, 4) Still voicing his dissatisfactions as they step outside the pub and, presumably hoping for some response, Jim watches helplessly as his companion – his condition now exacerbated by the fresh air – collapses to his knees on the pavement. Swaying uncontrollably and helpless to assist, Jim looks on as two bystanders lift his drunken companion to his feet and take him home.

On reporting for work the next day, Jim is ordered home by the foreman. An argument ensues, the situation quickly escalates to a confrontation in which Jim rages at the foreman and a group of attendant workers, 'Is there a man amongst you as could make me go home?' […] 'There ain't a man amongst you as could do it, I ain't going home, I'm stopping here'. (*BH*, 5) In

a final act of drunken belligerence Jim attempts to intimidate Curly, another labourer currently loading his own hod: 'Why don't you get a bloody hod?' he shouts. Further antagonisms follow when, having fetched his own hod and, with some difficulty set it up in preparation, Jim proceeds to show Curly the 'right' way to load and carry a hod. Reaching for a spade, Jim loses his balance and glimpses his hod as it falls to the ground, its shaft breaking off beneath the box. 'It was broken! *His hod was broken!* It could easily be repaired, but he could not think of that'. (*BH*, 8) Jim is momentarily transfixed. 'What the hell's the matter with you man?' asks Curly, 'I broke me hod,' said Jim. Curly sympathises, but Jim demands Curly retrieve his hod. 'What for' asks Curly? 'Give it to me!' demanded Jim. In a parody of funereal solemnity, Curly places the damaged hod in Jim's outstretched arms tucking the shaft under his right arm. Having returned home, 'Look', he says to his wife, on entering the parlour with tears running down his cheeks, 'Look Mother, I broke me hod'. (*BH*, 9) At which point the story ends.

Having valorised work to the extent that he has come to define himself through it, Jim Belcher might initially appear to have enlisted in the ranks of Roy Johnson's 'dependable proletarian[s]'.[114] The term appears amongst Johnson's list of the subsidiary values attaching to such fictional embodiments of the 'puritan work-ethic' as: an honest day's work; the employee who 'refuses to cheat his employer by having time off'; 'support of monogamy and the nuclear family'; 'respect for private property and middle-class legality', all of which reflect a working-class subjectivity that depicts workers as 'perfect pawns of [the] employing class.'[115] In adopting this stance, Johnson follows the 'reproduction' critique adopted by those who perceive working-class literary endeavour as naively emulating traditional bourgeois forms and, by so doing, obliquely propping up bourgeois morality. While this thesis takes the view that Halward's short stories present as anything but an endorsement of the dominant ideology, there are elements of Johnson's critique that need to be addressed. As Ross McKibbin suggests:

> [M]any working men were individualist by occupation or temperament, and such individualism was not, except in one or two cases, overridden by an active sense of community. This cultural and vocational diversity was typified and advanced by the unions. Craft-pride, real and legitimate if exaggerated, was deeply divisive and more than one local Labour Party foundered on disputes between 'skilled' and 'unskilled' unions.' The status consciousness which accompanied class-pride undermined working-class *esprit de corps* as much as it did that of any other class.[116]

The embodiment of the puritan work ethic and the associated moralities of decency and pride that constitute Halward's protagonist will, from a Marxist perspective, be doubtless construed as 'assimilationist'. However, for Pamela Fox they demonstrate a form of 'resistance' by showing the need felt by members of the working-class to 'win back [the] momentary sense of autonomy

and self-respect,' she believed was constitutive of the essential 'difference' in the narratives of working-class writers.'[117] Given his experience on the building sites of inter-war Birmingham, it is highly probable Halward had encountered a real-life Jim Belcher whose 'hardman' persona interested him and inspired this characterisation. In *Masculinities*, Raewyn. W. Connell cites the work of Mike Donaldson whose researches into manual work identify strength, insensitivity and toughness as more 'reflect[ive] of economic realit[ies]' than machismo pure and simple.[118] Donaldson claims:

> [W]orking-men's bodily capacities *are* their economic asset, are what they put on the labour market. But this asset changes. Industrial labour under the regime of profit uses up the workers' bodies, through fatigue, injury and mechanical wear and tear. The decline of strength, threatening loss of income or the job itself, can be offset by the growth of skill – up to a point. It is at that point, unless he is very lucky, that his labouring days are over.[119]

The masculine ethos of the building site was not, and perhaps still isn't, an environment known for delicacy of expression, or kindly disposed to emotional candour.[120] Reputations have to be earned and maintained, toughness, brawn and hard-graft being the requisite attributes. Opportunities for the discussion of one's domestic disappointments or the finer shadings of everyday anxiety are few, if non-existent, the nearest thing to counselling or psychotherapy, a 'man-to-man' in the local pub which – by offering itself as a neutral space between private and public spheres – provided a suitable setting in which to unburden one's anxieties. In line with Chekhov's' dictum, 'I want to know how your characters feel not how you feel,' Halward's narrator effectively withdraws leaving the incensed and disillusioned Jim Belcher to voice his dissatisfactions.[121] Given the vitriol of his outburst, one is left in no doubt that his daughter's elopement with a married man drew heavily on Jim's emotional capital. Yet to describe her as a whore was to exaggerate grossly her misdemeanour. Rather than choosing a more delicate form of expression, Jim's bluff and bluster might be construed as a deliberate subterfuge designed to conceal his shame while simultaneously forestalling the censure and opprobrium he anticipated from the wider working-class community.

Communicated in plain, workmanlike prose, eschewing figurative language and shaped in a syntax rarely stepping beyond the simple sentence, rather than 'abandoning' the 'crude vigour' of working-class speech fearing it might not be artistically 'correct,' Halward unashamedly reinstates it.[122] His stories display a remarkable ear for the cadence and rhythms of his fellow Birmingham citizens and facilitate the reader's visualisation of them as they engage in the quotidian struggle. Pamela Fox cites Basil Bernstein's work on the production of socio-linguistic

codes and explains that the '*public* language' used by working-class speakers is 'primarily a means of making *social* not *individual* qualifications'.[123] Contrasting it with the access of middle-class speakers to 'a formal language rich in personal, individual qualifications and characterized by complex, causal connections,' Fox considers working-class language is 'tough' language, incapable of expressing intimate feelings. Its very structure prohibits the articulation of 'experiences of difference'.[124] Less a display of outrage, Jim's outburst might be better read as a cry for help, signifying simultaneously a sense of deep-felt shame and personal crisis. In his clumsy attempt to provoke a discussion with his drinking companion, Jim risks 'self-exposure'. Citing the work of cultural studies pioneer Helen Merrell Lynd, Fox explains how shame may serve an emancipatory function:

> The dual experiences of exposure and vulnerability, which are part and parcel of the shame dynamic, not only wound; they aid in the production of self-knowledge, community and social critique. After suffering involuntary exposure, one can *choose* to expose that exposure, as it were to another: "If … one can sufficiently risk uncovering oneself and sufficiently trust another person, to seek means of communicating shame, the risking of exposure can be in itself an experience of release, expansion, self-revelation, a coming forward of belief in oneself". Self-awareness and confidence become possible because in the process of revealing the shame of being shamed, often one is exposing oppressive societal norms and values as well.[125]

Whether Jim Belcher was able to access the emancipatory consolation of his self-exposure is unknown; nonetheless, coming to terms with his daughter's elopement was clearly difficult for him, her disappearance with a married man further evidence of a world out of step with his moral code. For contemporary readers of Halward's story, Jim Belcher's shame offers an insight into some of the 'oppressive societal norms and values' prevalent during the pre-war decade.

In this respect Halward's story departs from traditional realist or naturalist narratives which offer a hierarchical discourse culminating in affirmative closure and moves closer to Catherine Belsey's 'interrogative text' where 'points of view' are brought 'into unresolved collision or contradiction' and where the reader is called upon to supply or venture meaning.[126] The application of Pamela Fox's 'shame dynamic' to Halward's story prompts a consideration of how bourgeois notions of morality were emulated by the working-class community where, according to Fox '[T]he need to represent one's self and family as decent, self-sufficient members of the community derived as much from other working-class spectators as from condescending middle-class investigators'.[127] The clash between contemporary moral values and Jim's protective instinct towards his daughter present as the ideological subtext to Halward's story which, rather

than offering the 'readerly' assurance of the traditional realist text, renders it closer to the kind of 'open' text described by Fredric Jameson whose hermeneutic necessitates:

> [T]he rewriting of the literary text in such a way that the latter may itself be seen as the rewriting or restructuration of a prior historical or ideological *subtext*, it being always understood that that "subtext" is not immediately present as such, not some common-sense external reality, nor even the conventional narratives of history manuals, but rather must itself always be (re)constructed after the fact.[128]

The episode in which Jim inveighs against his daughter's 'shameful' behaviour complies with Edgar Allan Poe's requirement that the short-story should contain 'no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one of pre-established design'. Occurring typographically and emotionally at the heart of Halward's story, Jim's somewhat elliptical reference to his daughter's behaviour suggests an inner-conflict oscillating between profound shame and protective anxiety. It was inevitable that Jim's excessive self-regard would encounter its nemesis in the form of public humiliation and exposure. True to Poe's dicta, Halward had sown the seeds of Jim's discontent in the opening paragraph of his story. Jim's lifetime in the building trade, his vicarious pride at having worked with master-craftsmen 'in the days when work was done leisurely and well', are contrasted with the shoddy workmanship on the site at which he is currently employed, where 'the houses, every one alike, were thrown up overnight and the plaster slapped on the walls with a shovel'. (*BH*, 1) While the broken hod symbolises Jim's physical fatigue, it also stands in for the more profound spiritual crisis set in motion by the elopement of his daughter, the last straw in the sequence of assaults on his self-esteem. Less epiphany than weary resignation, Jim's workplace 'breakdown,' represents his realisation that the puritan work ethic embodied in his notion of the 'grafter' is no longer a valued attribute. Pamela Fox explains that the individual's confrontation with contemporary behaviours:

> [F]inally hinges upon the clashing of different social and moral "values" in specific locations at specific moments, highlighting the trauma experienced by members of communities marginal to dominant culture: those most likely to feel shame are those made to feel "inappropriate" by dominant cultural norms.[129]

Yet, Jim's workplace perturbations are as nothing compared to his private misgivings. The close-knit domestic unit he and his wife have struggled to maintain is now the subject of public opprobrium. Working-class communities were ill-disposed towards the female party in extra-marital affairs, especially involvements where the absconding of a breadwinning male spouse

might lead to his family's impoverishment. Gossip and 'local talk', as Pamela Fox indicates 'took on a policing function' for 'reputation was a prime concern in working-class culture, across regions and borders, and proved burdensome, as well as empowering'.[130]

Jim's moral code is unheeded by a daughter whose behaviour represents the rejection of both her father's and her community's value system underlining Raymond Williams' observation that the social-character of an epoch may be revealed by the conflict between 'generations who never quite talk the same language'.[131] In this respect, Jim's daughter joins such heroines of working-class fiction as Henry Green's Lily Gates, Walter Greenwood's Helen Hawkins, Brierley's Jane Cook and Leslie Halward's own, chocolate-factory, production-line worker Ida, all of whom, as Pamela Fox points out, attempt to 'mark out an individual identity' […] '[in order to] escape] the bleakness of working-class experience [and] class subjectivity associated largely with oppression and hemmed in by numbing factory work and/or overcrowded, often violent households'.[132] Rather than seeking assimilation, her quest for distinctness is motivated less from a desire to emulate bourgeois or dominant culture than the search for a personal identity. According to Fox, this search 'both competes with and complements their mission of class solidarity [and] creates a model of subjectivity that ultimately falls into neither bourgeois nor Marxist categories.'[133] Likewise her father Jim, who, in seeking individual agency – rather than merely functioning as the unquestioning 'good subject' of bourgeois interpellation – moves beyond the figure of 'pliant and dependable proletarian', to align with such literary counterparts as Tressell's Frank Owen or Brierley's Jack Cook who each offer:

> [P]articularly striking examples of a hybrid consciousness. Through their negotiations of public and private arenas, they on one level certainly reveal their affiliations with the introspective sealed off psyches of avant garde literature. Yet their privileged difference from other working-class figures never goes all the way; it is mediated or balanced by their shared material class position and, finally, their class allegiance. Shame dictates their desire to escape the working-class 'mass,' but they know they cannot. And, more importantly, should not. […] At times the narratives may fall short in making this prized, quasi-individualist identity work toward radical ends […] But that's ultimately not the point. In the end, the result of such ideological and formal tensions is an amalgam representing nothing less than a new class subject and cultural form.[134]

This reading has illustrated how the 'resistance dynamic' operates not only across, but also within, class boundaries. Seeking to understand resistance as 'a refusal of dominated, along with dominant culture,' Fox stresses the importance of attending to 'the variety of ways in which members of marginal or subordinate groups redefine for themselves what is at stake as they

mediate cultural and economic forces.'[135] Halward's characterisations not only resist the deterministic conception of naturalism whereby members of the lower-orders simply flounder as passive subjects, but also that of master narratives which consider working-class texts as naïve reproductions of the dominant ideology and suggest instead how working-class individuals are consciously active in their own self-fashioning and identity formation. J. McAleer's assertion that Henry Green's *Living* 'is a book about how people really live: their hopes, but also their compromises and defeats', is equally applicable to Halward's narratives, where representations of class struggle, are apolitical, and take place entirely within the working-class community.[136] As Walter Allen commented:

> For two or three years he was greatly admired. Then there was the war, and the magazines that had published him disappeared. After the war, his kind of writing was no longer fashionable. He seems to have been powerless to change it. His was a trapped talent. For all that, his achievement within that talent was unrivalled in England at that time.[137]

The works discussed in this chapter have sought to situate contemporary working-class writing in the liminal space between propagandist rhetoric on one hand and formal experimentation on the other. As I have shown, Walter Allen and Leslie Halward each re-configured traditional novelistic forms to serve their own ends. Following the example of Henry Green's *Living,* Allen appropriated the techniques of cross-cutting and montage specific to Documentary film 'not only to interpret creatively and in social terms the life of the people as it exists in reality' but also to caution his readers against the superficiality of contemporary experience as depicted in the politically-emasculating, soporific confections of the Hollywood movie industry and, by extension, the machinations of the bourgeois order it aimed to mystify and obscure.[138] Leslie Halward's accounts of workplace experience, rather than urging political consciousness, developed the scientific objectivity of naturalism to explore his protagonist's inner thoughts and emotions. Despite Croft's claim that he 'rarely describe[ed] psychology', Halward's portrait of Jim Belcher provides a perceptive and sympathetic account of the anguished fragile soul that lay beneath the tough exterior of his ageing workman.

The discussion of work, its centrality and fundamental importance in people's lives continues in the following chapter where I examine its inverse: unemployment, the spectre of which haunted 1930s Britain. In the wake of the global depression that gripped the West following the Wall St. Crash of 1929, the critical perspectives applied to working-class writing intensified. As Ramon Lopez Ortega remarks unemployment lurked behind all the recurrent

images – poverty, the fruitless search for work, life on the dole, the Means Test, the hunger marches, the strikes.[139] Questions as to whether working-class texts ought to function as a weapon in the class struggle or whether they were to be considered on their literary merits alone were frequently iterated during this period. The critical criteria used to frame these questions were shaped along a theoretical continuum informed by Comintern policies, the most significant of which being the change from the third 'class against class' period begun in 1928, to the softening of approach registered by the adoption of Popular Front policies in 1934. As Kenneth Ledbetter indicates, changes in Comintern policy had considerable implications during the early years of the decade where '*only* novels concerned with the proletariat in social relationships (*i.e.*, class conflict) in which the revolutionary movement was portrayed as larger than life and where the quickening class-consciousness of the worker was [often] *anticipated* rather than honestly described could expect sympathetic treatment in leftist journals (my emphasis)'.[140] The following chapter will trace the reception and fortunes of the Birmingham group's narratives as they sought to negotiate the turbulence of this critical climate.

Notes

[1] W.H. Auden, 'A Communist to Others' August 1932. *The English Auden,* Edward Mendelson ed, *The English Auden,* p. 120.
[2] Adrian Caesar, *Dividing Lines: Poetry, Class and Ideology in the 1930s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 50.
[3] Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present,* Chapter XI, Labour.
[4] Ryle, Martin, and Kate Soper, *To Relish the Sublime: Culture and Self-realisation in Postmodern Times* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 186.
[5] Ibid.
[6] H. Gustav Klaus, *Tramps Workmates and Revolutionaries: Working-Class Stories of the 1920's* (London: Journeyman Press, 1993), p. 5.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Gustav Klaus, H. and Stephen Knight, *British Industrial Fictions* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 3.
[9] Chris Baldick, *The Modern Movement*, p. 185.
[10] H. Gustav Klaus, *The Socialist Novel in Britain,* p. 3.
[11] Adrian Caesar, *Dividing Lines*, pp. 10, 11.
[12] Ibid, p. 12.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Chris Cook, 'The Work Ethic in the 1930s,' *History Today*, 33. 7. (1983) <https://www.historytoday.com> [accessed 14th July 2018], Unpaginated (pull out article).
[15] Auden, 'Letter to Lord Byron' Stanza II, Part 5, p. 197.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Adrian Caesar, *Dividing Lines,* p. 12.
[18] Ibid. Caesar cites John Stevenson's essay 'Myth and Reality: Britain in the Nineteen-Thirties' *Crisis and Controversy*, ed. A Sked and C. Cook (London, 1976), pp. 90 – 110. Stevenson's figures are challenged by Alan Howkins and John Saville in *The Nineteen Thirties: A Revisionist History,* although acknowledging the difficulty of establishing an accurate figure, they remark upon the fluctuations and influence of seasonal work in the building trade or the effect of temporary lay-offs in the motor trade owing to seasonal variations in demand. *The Socialist Register* 1979, pp. 89-100. Downloaded from the *Socialist Register Website.* Transcribed and marked up by Eidie O'Callaghan for the Marxist Internet Archive.
[19] P. D. Anthony, *The Ideology of Work* (London: Tavistock Publications Limited, 1977), p. 288.
[20] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Pelican, 1963), p. 230.
[21] Raymond Williams 'The Welsh Industrial Novel' in Williams (ed.), *Culture and Materialism*: *Selected Essays*, (London: Verso), pp. 213-229, cited in Phil O'Brien, chapter 'The Deindustrial Novel: Twenty–First–Century British Fiction and the Working-Class' in, Clarke, Ben and Nick Hubble *Working-Class Writing: Theory and Practice* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 229, 230.
[22] Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters,* p. 159.
[23] Chris Baldick, *The Modern Movement,* p. 184.
[24] Ibid.
[25] H. Gustav Klaus, *The Socialist Novel in Britain,* p. 3.
[26] Roy Johnson, 'The Proletarian Novel', *Literature and History*, 84-95. p. 93.
[27] Carole Snee, 'Walter Brierley: A Test Case', in *Red Letters: Communist Party Literature Journal,* 3. (Autumn 1976), 11-13. p. 11.
[28] Notably Christopher Isherwood, Walter Allen and Harold Heslop who (mistakenly) believed Green to be of 'proletarian stock' and that, along with James Hanley, Green was among a 'new school of writers' who offered some potential to re-invigorate the working-class novel. Similar claims have been voiced by David Lodge and Jeremy Treglown.
[29] H. Gustav Klaus, 'Socialist Fiction of the 1930s' in John Lucas*, The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy* (London: Harvester Press Ltd, 1978), p. 30.
[30] Chris Baldick, *The Modern Movement*, p. 185.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Walter Allen, 'An Artist of the Thirties' in John Lehmann ed, *Folios of New Writing,* Spring (London: Hogarth Press, 1941), p. 153.
[33] Harold Heslop had also been of a similar view, believing the author belonged to 'a new school of writers including James Hanley'. Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers*, p. 322.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Allen's re-evaluation parallels Terry Eagleton's assertion that literary priorities are often in a state of flux 'a work may be realist in June and anti-realist in December'. Walter Allen, 'Thirties Fiction: A View from the Seventies', *Twentieth Century Literature,* 20 (1974), p. 246.

[36] Walter Allen, in John Lehmann, Ed, *Folios of New Writing*, Spring 1941, p. 153.
[37] Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream,* p. 215.
[38] Ibid, p .216.
[39] Raymond Williams 'The Welsh Industrial Novel' in Williams (ed.).*Culture and Materialism*: *Selected Essays*, (London, Verso). pp. 213-229. Cited in Phil O'Brien, 'The Deindustrial Novel: Twenty-First-Century British Fiction and The Working-Class'. in Clarke, Ben and Nick Hubble, eds, *Working-Class Writing*, p. 229.
[40] Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream,* p. 216.
[41] Valentine Cunningham. *British Writers*, p. 320. Ramon Lopez Ortega, 'The Language of the Working-class Novel in the 1930s'. In H. Gustav Klaus, *The Socialist Novel,* 122-144. p. 124.
[42] Ibid.
[43] H. Gustav Klaus, 'Socialist Fiction of the 1930s', in John Lucas, *The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy,* pp.13-41.p. 31.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Marius Hentea, 'Fictions of Class and Community in Henry Green's "Living"', *Studies in the Novel,* 42 (2010), p. 326. In smaller industrial units such as the Green's foundry more familial/co-operative industrial relationships may have obtained. However, industrial unrest was not uncommon in Birmingham. Jessie Eden led women press workers to down tools at Birmingham's automobile electronics manufacturer Joseph Lucas in 1926 and in 1931 where protests against 'Speed Up' led 10,000 employees to walk out in a single week.
[46] H. Gustav Klaus, *The Socialist Novel In Britain,* p. 1.
[47] Andrzej Gasiorek, *Post-War British Fiction: Realism and After* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), pp. 3, 5.
[48] MacKay and Stonebridge, *British Fiction After Modernism,* p. 3.
[49] The Intermodernist approach, as exemplified in the writing of John Fordham *et al* encourages the recovery of working-class texts and a more dialectical, as opposed to sectarian, critique.
[50] Carol A. Wipf-Miller, 'Fictions of "Going Over": Henry Green and the New Realism', *Twentieth Century Literature,* 44.2. 135-154. p. 136.
[51] Ibid, p. 137.
[52] Terry Southern, Interview with Henry Green published in 'The Paris Review', 1958. In, *Surviving: The Uncollected Writings of Henry Green* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 247.
[53] J. McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain, 1914 – 1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). Cited in Jeremy Treglown, *Romancing: The Life and Work of Henry Green* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), p. 92.
[54] Andrzej Gasiorek, *Post-War British Fiction,* p. 35.
[55] BBC Broadcast published in 'The Listener', November 1950. In Henry Green, *Surviving,* p. 142.
[56] Henry Green, *Loving, Living and Party Going* (London: Viking, 2005), p. 278. A similar celebration of universal verities is evident when the Welshman Arthur Jones provides an impromptu song recital following the birth of his son. p. 265.
[57] H. Gustav Klaus, *The Socialist Novel in Britain,* p. 1.
[58] Jeremy Treglown, *Romancing,* p. 92.
[59] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 205.
[60] Ibid, p. 72.
[61] Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers,* p. 332.
[62] Lara Feigel, *Literature, Cinema and Politics 1930-1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 5.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Stephen Spender, The Left-Wing Orthodoxy', *New Verse*, 31-32 (Autumn 1938) cited in Williams and Matthews, Eds, *Rewriting the Thirties*, p. 79.
[65] Jeremy Treglown, *Romancing,* p. 68.
[66] Carol A. Wipf-Miller, 'Fictions of "Going over', p. 145.
[67] Ibid, p. 122.
[68] Ibid.
[69] J. M. Coetzee, 'The Man Who Went Shopping For Truth' *The Guardian* 20th January 2001. Review of Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* translated from the German and French by Howard Eiland and Kevin Mclaughlin. (Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2002).
[70] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1992), p. 48.
[71] Walter Allen Interview with Andy Croft 5th April 1982. Cited in Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days*, p. 256.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Lara Feigel, *Literature, Cinema and Politics,* p. 136.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ralph Bond 'Cinema in the Thirties' in Jon Clark and others *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the 30s* (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, 1979), p. 245.
[76] George Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier,* p. 79. ; Review of the *Lady in Question.* (1940) In *The Collected Works of George Orwell.* Vol. 12. p. 291. Cited in Lara Feigel, *Literature, Cinema and Politics,* p. 117.
[77] Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London: Harper Press, 2011), p. 652.

[78] Adorno to Benjamin in Fredric Jameson Ed, *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1977), p. 123.
[79] Steve Ellis, *British Writers and the Approach of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 1.
[80] W. B. Yeats, 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul', *W. B. Yeats: The Poems,* Ed, Daniel Albright (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1992),. p. 284.
[81] Allen's 'St. James' is based upon King Edward's Grammar School for Boys in Aston, Birmingham where Allen was a pupil, and which, as he told David Lodge, 'by virtue of its stained-glass windows and a curriculum including Latin, aspired to public school status'. Independent Television documentary 'As I was walking Down Bristol Street'. Central Television. Production number 1250/82, (1983).
[82] Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel 1890-1945* (Durham: North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1994).
[83] T. A. Jackson autobiography *Solo Trumpet: Some Memories of Socialist Agitation and Propaganda.* (1953) pp. 21, 22. In Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions,* p. 35.
[84] Lara Feigel. *Literature, Cinema and Politics, 1930 – 1945*, p. 136.
[85] Walter Allen, *As I Walked Down,* pp. 113, 114.
[86] Walter Allen, *The English Novel: A Short Critical History* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd), 1969.
[87] Postgate, Raymond and Margaret Storm Jameson, eds, Storm Jameson 'Writing in Revolt; Theory and Examples', *Fact,* Number 4 London, (1937), 9-18. p. 13.
[88] The Papers of Leslie Halward. 'A Talk to Birmingham Booklovers' Society', 24th September 1937. Birmingham Reference Library. MS 1293/106.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents*, p. 154.
[91] H.E. Bates, *The Modern Short Story: From 1809-1953* (London: Robert Hale, 1941), p. 203.
[92] Ibid, p. 206.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid, p. 16.
[95] Edward O'Brien, Introduction, pp. ix, x. Leslie Halward, *To Tea on Sunday.*
[96] Raymond Williams, 'Working-class, Proletarian, Socialist: Problems In Some Welsh Novels'. In H. Gustav Klaus, *The Socialist Novel In Britain,* 110-121. p. 111.
[97] Dion Smythe, *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), p. 176.
[98] Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions,* p. 2.
[99] Ibid, p. 3.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid, p. 2.
[102] Ibid, p. 4. Paul Willis was a member of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Birmingham University between 1972 and 1981.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Walter Allen, *As I Walked Down*, p. 69. ; Valentine Cunningham asked whether, as the son of a Pork Butcher, Leslie Halward was 'really' working Class. Cunningham, *British Writers Of The Thirties,* p. 306.
[105] Walter Allen, *As I Walked*, p. 69.
[106] Roy Johnson, 'The Proletarian Novel', *Literature and History,* 2. (Oct 1975), 84-95. p. 93.
[107] Leslie Halward, *Let Me Tell You,* p. 164.
[108] Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents*, p. 118.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Leslie Halward. 'Writing About the Working-Class.' Halward Papers. Birmingham Reference Library MS 1293/106/28, pp. 6, 8.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Paul Lester, *The Road to Excelsior Lodge: The Writings of Leslie Halward* (Birmingham: Protean Publications, 1988), p.9 ; Walter Allen, *The Short-Story in English,* p. 276.
[114] Roy Johnson, 'The Proletarian Novel', p. 88.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class*, p. 37.
[117] Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions,* p. 203.
[118] Mike Donaldson, cited in R. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd edn, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 55, 83.
[119] Ibid.
[120] A recent *Guardian* article (17th March 2017) revealed construction workers amongst those at greatest risk of committing suicide in the National workforce. 'Forward For Life' an organisation which provides suicide prevention training, attributed much of the problem to the simple fact that 'Blokes don't talk'.
[121] Leslie Halward, 'Introduction to Literature.' *The London Mercury,* 1938, p. 518.

[122] Roy Johnson, 'The Proletarian Novel', p. 92.
[123] Basil Bernstein, 'Class, Codes and Control'. Vol 1, *Theoretical Studies Towards a Sociology of Language.* (London: Routledge, 1971). Cited in Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions,* p. 105.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid, p. 16.
[126] Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Routledge, 1980), p. 92.
[127] Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions,* p. 98.
[128] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Routledge: London, 1981), p. 28.
[129] Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions,* p. 13.
[130] Ibid, pp. 98, 97.
[131] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution,* p. 48.
[132] Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions,* p.185.
[133] Ibid, p. 203.
[134] Ibid, p. 204.
[135] Ibid, p. 3.
[136] J. McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain,* in Jeremy Treglown, *Romancing,* p. 92.
[137] Walter Allen, *The Short Story in English,* p. 280.
[138] Laura Marcus, Paul Rotha's gloss on Grierson's definition that documentary was the 'Creative Treatment of Actuality'. In Laura Marcus 'The Creative Treatment of Actuality': John Grierson, Documentary Cinema and 'Fact' in the 1930s', in Kristen Bluemel, *Intermodernism,* 189-207. p. 190.
[139] Ramon Lopez Ortega, 'The Language of the Working-Class Novel of the 1930s'. In H. Gustav Klaus, *The Socialist Novel,* p. 122.
[140] Kenneth Ledbetter, 'Henry Roth's Call It Sleep: The Revival of the Proletarian Novel', *Twentieth Century Literature; A Scholarly and Critical Journal,* 12 (1966). 123-130. p. 123.

Chapter Two

Feeling the Pinch: Unemployment

This chapter will focus on the Birmingham group's response to the socio-political issue which came to define the 1930s: unemployment. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Birmingham group narratives have incurred a measure of guilt by association due largely to contemporary and later critical evaluations which perceived working-class writing as either enslaved to the conventions of naturalism or credulously emulating a realism whose formal conventions it was unable to transcend. The consequences were manifest in both an over-determined documentary content and an aesthetically-impoverished style where artistic skill was considered subordinate to political expression. Reading against the grain of this timeworn critique, this chapter will aim to overturn such negative evaluations to argue that the range of formal techniques and experimentation evident in Birmingham group narratives presents less as constrained *by* but rather as a reconfiguration *of* contemporary realist practice. The Birmingham writers challenge the assertion that the formal element in working-class writing is overwhelmed by the stridency of its political message and this chapter will demonstrate how, rather than forcibly expressing an authorial viewpoint, the political content of their narratives emerges unobtrusively from the dramatised situations in a manner more nuanced than clamant and often as a direct result of the formal devices employed.

Emerging as a result of the failure and dissolution of Ramsay McDonald's Labour administration, the United Kingdom's National Government of 1931 was a hung parliament. Embattled by the pressures of global depression, and lacking an alternative source of revenue, McDonald sought to reduce the treasury's outgoings by a reduction in the benefit payable to unemployed workers. The introduction of what later became known as 'The Means Test' appeared, especially to supporters of the party of labour, as the 'last straw' in a gathering and collective sense of dissatisfaction; viewed as intrusive, intimidating and unwelcome, it rapidly became the most hated government institution between the wars.[1] Though the situation was dire, as indicated in the introduction, Walter Allen considered 'the twenties boom had soared to far greater heights in the United States […] the slump was therefore the greater, and so was the sense of shock, outrage and betrayal'.[2] That contemporary literature should engage with the events now confronting so many Americans was stated in Joseph Freeman's introduction to *Proletarian Literature in the United States:*

> Social themes today correspond to the general experience of men, acutely conscious of the violent and basic transformations through which they are living, which they are helping to bring about. It does not require much imagination to see why workers and intellectuals sympathetic to the working class – and themselves victims of the socio-economic crisis – should be more interested in unemployment, strikes, the fight against war and fascism, revolution and counter-revolution than in nightingales, the stream of middle-class consciousness, or love in Greenwich Village.[3]

As its dust jacket announces, the stories within the covers of *Proletarian Literature in The United states,* were concerned 'to recognize the intimate ties between art and the social milieu from which it springs'. While giving the solipsistic focus of literary modernism short shrift, Freeman cautioned that, although the promotion of a proletarian ideology was important, this was not to be approached by heeding the strictures of a prescriptive 'party line' or by taking the form of a 'thesis' as propounded under the strictures of social-realism. He believed 'the true artist *should focus instead upon communicating the experience from which that thesis had arisen'* (my emphasis).[4] Thus, despite the more radical tone of America's literary response, Freeman, as had James T. Farrell, championed the primacy of imaginative prose writing to convey the lived-experience of those affected by the crisis.

An example of litotes, the expression 'feeling the pinch', used as the title of this chapter, derives from the 1880s and aimed to ironize and distance members of the working-class from the stigma attaching to their poverty. Again, as mentioned in the introduction, images from this period still haunt the collective memory whether in Dorothea Lange's photographs of depression hit America or of British newsreel footage showing cloth-capped, Jarrow Crusaders marching south to publicize their immiseration. In 1931, the BBC provided a series of broadcast talks on the subject of unemployment with speakers including Seebohm Rowntree, Herbert Morrison, John Maynard Keynes and Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin summing up. This congregation of notables registered the gravity of the situation and marked the beginning of a reversal in *laissez-faire* attitudes constructed on 'assumptions' that the collapse of prosperity might prove only a 'temporary continuance' and might simply 'go away.'[5] As Juliet Gardiner indicates, further talks followed, as William Beveridge – whose interest in a system of national insurance would later provide the blueprint for the Welfare State – set out to 'diagnose the disease of unemployment,' and discovered that 'contrary to the myths of social-malingering, or the inactivity of that residual section of the population who would always be unemployable for reasons of physical or moral deficiency, as perpetuated in the popular press', its causes were structural in origin.[6] As Gardiner continued, Beveridge regretted he had not made his talks more 'human', for, rather than assailing his radio listeners with abstract notions and yards of statistics, he reflected he

should have talked more about the social consequences, how *actual people* (my italics) were affected, for he had begun to appreciate:

> There is not a special class or kind of people who constitute the unemployed. They come from almost every calling and have as great a variety of interests and capacities as any other member of the community. They are ordinary decent people like ourselves to whom an extraordinary misfortune has happened.[7]

This brief excursus into the social history of the period is made to highlight aspects of the contemporary discourse addressing the consequences of long-term unemployment. Central to this discussion is the distinction Beveridge made between 'abstract notions and yards of statistics' and 'the social consequences of how actual people were affected' in short: the difference between quantitative and qualitative accounts of unemployment. Despite the profusion of statistical (quantitative) evidence provided by contemporary reports and surveys, the broadcaster and editor of the *Listener* R. S. Lambert and the historian H. L. Beales each considered qualitative evidence of far greater value in fostering public awareness of the human cost and tragedy of unemployment and were increasingly impatient with what they considered the sociologists' delay in enquiring into the 'psychological and social, as distinct from its purely economic and political effects'.[8] Believing they had opened up a new area of study into the 'psycho-pathology of human communities affected by profound disturbances of the basis of economic life', they sought qualitative evidence in the shape of personal accounts and testimonies to 'fill the statistical gaps where quantitative material [was] not available'.[9] As remarked in the introduction, there was a consensus that, compared with statistical, scientific, philosophical, or political forms of discourse, imaginative literature, more specifically, imaginative, working-class literature, was more attuned to describing the psychological damage visited upon working people by unemployment and more effective in communicating its hardships to readers (as yet) untouched by its consequences. Discussing the novel's discursive 'function', Terry Eagleton propounds: 'The difference between science and art is, not that they deal with different objects, but that they deal with the same objects in different ways. Science gives us a conceptual knowledge of a situation; art gives us the experience of that situation.'[10]

Whilst the depredations of long-term unemployment remained the focus of much 'quantitative' investigation during the thirties, it was in accounts such as Beales & Lambert's that middle-class readers began to appreciate:

> How little, indeed do we yet know of what unemployment means, not in terms of economic loss, but in terms of human experience. If we are asked such questions as: "When a man loses his job,

> how long does he continue looking hopefully for a new one, or: when does he resign himself to life without economic incentive?" or: "Is the general effect of long-continued unemployment stimulating or deadening to the individual's interest in politics and public affairs?" our answers at present must be based on surmise and casual scraps of evidence. We have hardly yet discovered where the shoe pinches physically, and how much more ignorant are we of the intellectual and moral changes involved.[11]

First appearing in *The Listener* and later collected and published in more permanent form by Gollancz in 1934, Beales and Lambert's *Memoirs of the Unemployed* followed in the footsteps of *Die Arbeitslosen von Marienthal*, the first systematic analysis into the sociological effects of unemployment conducted by a team of social psychologists from the University of Vienna.[12] The 'Stage Theory' of unemployment propounded here was based upon an analysis of accounts provided by the redundant textile workers of Marienthal, a small Austrian village in which the entire workforce had been terminated owing to the economic depression. Unfortunately, some of the findings of this research were subsequently discredited – largely owing to the local specifics of the control sample – being, as Ross McKibbin suggests, little more than 'truistic.'[13]

Walter Brierley's *Listener* contribution came about via an acquaintance of his wife, who suggested he provide an article detailing the effects of unemployment upon himself and his family. His account 'Frustration and Bitterness – A Colliery Banksman' was based upon personal experience and, following the requirement to provide factual detail as set out in a short guiding memorandum, Brierley's *'Memoir',* though autobiographical in the sense of 'non-fiction', registered as a formal departure from the offerings of his fellow contributors. In a sub-section entitled 'Selfishness Bred of Unemployment'*,* Brierley records, in a language reminiscent of Puritan writer John Bunyan, the spiritual and psychological damage wrought by unemployment: the inner questioning, the creeping within oneself, the sense of inferiority, despair, shame and social isolation, each complicit in unsettling the self-esteem of the workless individual. Brierley records 'it has made me, who once prided myself on a generous and self-sacrificing nature – a real follower of Christ – a selfish person.'[14] He articulates the psychological debilitations wrought upon him by having to depend upon the State for money without having honestly earned it and how his loss of faith in everything except his own capabilities, led to constant rumination and self-loathing. Unemployment's corrosive effects are manifest in a cynicism whereby even the friendliest of gestures: the offer of a cigarette, or the buying of a drink, are seen as condescension; comparable to the disingenuity he discerns in the 'striving of others for position in politics, trade union or cooperative societies,' though there is a redeeming honesty and self-knowledge in Brierley's admission that, given the opportunity, he would probably do the same himself.

Brierley's *Listener* article moves beyond the purely autobiographical toward a mode more usually encountered in novelistic discourse. This is illustrated below where snatches of entreaty alternate with first-person narrative to foreground the speaker's thought processes:

> It follows of course that family life is made more difficult, testiness creeps in and often condemnation of a system is transferred illogically to the irksome limitations of the married state.
>
> "If one were only single, without restraint, limitations."
>
> "If it were not for the child."
>
> These thoughts, sometimes expressed, give, when they do find an outlet in speech, occasion for a warm altercation, the resulting bitterness of which is only erased by periods of unintelligent silence.[15]

Here Brierley combines self-awareness with an appropriate grammatical form (the subjunctive) in order to render his inner-feelings. Though clearly unaware of contemporary psychological terminology, in remarking upon such 'periods of unintelligent silence' Brierley's narrator reveals both an emotional intelligence and prescience in identifying the behaviour pattern contemporary psychology describes as 'passive aggressive'. Brierley's 'stylised' account of his circumstances provides a bridge between quantitative, report-based, discourse and imaginative prose fiction. That such accounts might engage the sympathies of the wider public was mentioned by Brierley during a talk he gave in 1965 for a BBC Midlands Radio programme, *Turning Point,* where he described how, following publication of his *Listener* article, the Bishop of Worcester's wife invited 'my wife, my son and me to spend a fortnight at Hartlebury Castle.'[16] Despite the generosity revealed here, Brierley's 'memoir' also caught the attention of the Birmingham writer John Hampson. As Christopher Hilliard remarks: 'Working-class writers with contacts in publishing and literary circles […] could be instrumental in helping newer writers into print' and he illustrated this point by specific reference to the Birmingham group, noting how 'the ripples spreading out from [them] reached out to other working-class writers'.[17] Hampson's interest in Brierley's article would certainly prove fortuitous and it was owing to Brierley's collaboration with Hampson, and later Walter Allen that stemmed from Brierley's barely disguised plea for assistance in the *Listener* article cited here, that the doors to literary success began to move slightly ajar for the Derbyshire writer:

> Long ago I bought a typewriter and have had some minor successes. I study the styles of the great novelists and write and write and write. Only a few days ago I finished a novel I had been working on for over a year. If it is ever accepted (and if it is not, my optimism will lose none of its

> quality) I hope the reviewers will take it into consideration that the author is an unemployed miner, subjected monthly to the Means Test inquisition, knowing neither security nor normal comfort – matters creating a state of mind decidedly incompatible with that necessary for sustained effort.' This then, my success in the literary field – I never dream of a bestseller – seems the only light in our domestic darkness.[18]

Hilliard describes how, following an introduction to Walter Allen, the two Birmingham writers each read drafts of the novel Brierley alluded to – Brierley, it appeared, had been smitten with a desire to write not dissimilar to that described by his fellow Birmingham group writer Leslie Halward – and, via friends and contacts, Allen and Hampson made strenuous efforts to get it published.[19] Hampson early saw the potential in Brierley's work and appreciated the ex-miner's innate sense of literary style, developed emotional intelligence, psychological insights and 'gift of irony,' which might – combined with subject material derived from his life-experience – prove invaluable in a novel focusing upon the debilitating effects of unemployment, not only upon the workless individual but also his family and, more broadly speaking, his class. In April 1934 Hampson wrote Brierley a detailed letter advising as to the form his novel might take. He suggested structuring it around the days of the week and progressively heightening the dramatic tension in the days leading up to the visit of the Means Test Man. Constructed around the days of the week, the novel was episodic rather than plot based and resembled the device Hampson had himself employed in *Saturday Night at the Greyhound,* that had begun as a three act play, and would also provide the diary-form structure of Allen's own first published novel *Innocence Is Drowned*. In a further letter Hampson commented 'I'm glad that Allen supported my demand for a 'day to day' novel. I am quite sure that such a book will do a great deal to establish you as a considerable writer. The novel '*a la* Woolf' can come later.'[20] More detailed advice would follow with Hampson proposing it:

> [O]ught to include 'reminiscences of bygone days when [Jack his principal character] was free from the spectre of unemployment, […] make capital of each and every difference between the man in employment and the man workless. The idea of contrast, is, I feel, important. [21]

Reflecting upon 'happier times' becomes a minor trope in the unemployment novel and, as will be shown, is a recurrent feature of the works analysed below. Assenting to a suggestion of Brierley's, Hampson agreed:

> You could still use the idea of the family who are determined to keep their self-respect and the family who let things go.' […] Your main figure, must be a man of common sense, with great personal honesty, so that he is conscious of his own feelings and weaknesses. Do keep the people

> near earth, let them have a few high asperations [sic] but make those fleeting. The more detachment you get the better, and do give your gift of irony full play. I am certain that you can produce a very powerful novel. You do know that I am willing to help in any way that I can. [22]

Hampson's and Allen's correspondence with Brierley was not all one-way-traffic. The fact that Brierley acted so readily on their suggestions is not to characterise him as a novice or time-serving, literary apprentice. The two Birmingham writers were confident in their assessment of Brierley's potential and their interest in his work exceeded mere curiosity.[23] As commentators such as Hilliard and Croft have pointed out, the notion of patronage was always a determining factor in the development of the contemporary working-class writer, as revealed in the commercial success of Brierley's novel; it was owing to the dissemination of his work 'through friends of friends of Hampson's that the book found its way to Methuen [who] published it'.[24]

This chapter will look at the issue of unemployment as it was addressed in both the novels and short-stories of the Birmingham group. Beginning with Walter Brierley's novel *Means Test Man,* I shall move on to discussing John Hampson's 'Man About the House' before concluding with Walter Allen's *Innocence is Drowned.*

First published in 1935, it is owing to its re-evaluation and rescue by Andy Croft that *Means Test Man* was reissued by Spokesman in 1983 and remains currently available. Unlike the works of lesser known counterparts, Brierley's first published novel has begun to accrete wider critical discussion. Rather than revisiting well-trodden critical ground therefore, this reading will focus on aspects of the novel which, having received less critical focus, remain central to consideration of a work described by some as the Birmingham group's 'most celebrated production'.[25] I shall initially examine how Brierley drew upon working-class speech patterns, tone of voice, satire and irony to determine the extent to which these formal devices are constitutive of the novel's political orientation. Following which I consider how the influence of D. H. Lawrence may have prompted Brierley to experiment with elements of expressionist technique that found him reaching beyond the formal parameters of the traditional realist/naturalist novel.

> Old Humphrey never attempted to soften the broad Derbyshire dialect he used when speaking to anyone. The children were always expectantly amused when they saw him take his stand behind the big bible…
>
> … "Ar'm gooin' ta ex ya a kind a riddle. Yo'll a'e ta listen."
>
> "Ner…

> "As greyn as grass an' isna grass? / An' bears a yeller flower; / As many spikes as yo can cernt / In twenty-fower hower."
> -no pause. "Wot is it?"
> "Gorse," called out a few voices at once.p
> Old Humphrey showed the pleasure he felt. " Ar m'lad. Ar m'gel. Goss. That's it Goss. Yo mun ex ya mothers an' faythers that w'en ya get omm". (*MM*, 71-2)

It is not uncommon to find renderings of regional accent or dialect forms permeating working-class texts and, as the above passage illustrates, *Means Test Man* was no exception. However, other speech-based elements, for example 'tone of voice' and the 'ironic stance,' indicative of an 'attitude' to the external world derived from working-class speech communities, more possibly, working-class 'consciousness', appear to have been overlooked. These factors nevertheless combine with others – for example the use of figurative forms of language, arising from what John Fordham, following Lukacs, describes as the worker's 'reified consciousness' – and together inform Brierley's style.[26] Richard Hoggart remarks on the importance of finding an appropriate register in his discussion of 'Tone' in autobiographical writing:

> [I]t is more difficult to find your style if you are from the working classes. Almost any ex-working-class writer can produce reasonably lifelike dialogue by sprinkling 'daft' and 'mucky' in odd places… it is easier for certain socially-conditioned manners and tones to express themselves, because so much of our writing has traditionally been expressed in those tones of voice.[27]

Hoggart describes how, on a re-reading Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers,* he noticed for the first time that 'its movement, its 'kick', its voice, were those of a working man who had become articulate and – instead of acquiring idioms foreign to his deep-rooted ways of feeling – had kept the rhetoric of his kind and so (this is the point) could better say what *he* had to say.'[28] Henry Green's *Living* to some extent illustrates the inverse of this process. Ramon Lopez Ortega discusses Green's search for a suitable language by which to render his working-class subject material; material that represented for him a completely different way of life, and one for which most available means seemed inadequate.[29] Though undocumented, it is clear that Brierley likewise sought an appropriate linguistic form to communicate his experience. Like Green, we may surmise his innovations were motivated by a desire to break, at least temporarily, with literary conventions he found unequal to his task and develop a voice, 'to say better what he had to say'. We shall see that, at times his style resembled the representational experiments of modernism, more specifically expressionism, than the documentary realism or naturalism with which working-class writing has generally been associated.

Chronicling a week in the life of the Cook family, Jack an unemployed miner, Jane his wife and John their young son, *Means Test Man* is fuelled by insights gained from Brierley's experience of unemployment in the East Midland (Derbyshire) coalfield, and, while clearly indebted to its author's repository of lived-experience, the novel moves beyond 'formal' autobiography to reveal a surprising level of psychological awareness and emotional intelligence. While nurturing a sense of solidarity and encouragement with families enduring similar circumstances, for those unfamiliar with its debilitating effects, it offered an authentic portrayal of the psychological damage and inner turmoil that unemployment wrought upon its victims. Brierley's account of a family's emotional anxieties during the week leading up to the visit of the Means Test inspector is cyclical and may be taken as representative of any given week during their struggle. As with Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole,* such circularity subverts the bourgeois realist novel's trajectory towards resolution and affirmation. Effectively serving to constrain his protagonists under a form of 'house arrest' and locked into a cycle of dreary, and seemingly interminable, repetition, the movement of Brierley's novel is generated solely by the alternation of the view point characters and accounts of their respective states of mind. This is not to cast the novel as the unremitting exercise in 'over-emphatic naturalism' Walter Allen attributed to many working-class novels, somewhat paradoxically, Brierley's alternation of viewpoint and psychological exploration works alongside the documentation of quotidian detail to imbue his characterisations with added depth and authenticity.[30]

At the outset of the novel, the Means Test Inspector's visit is described as 'that agony-day once a month, he dreaded it, more for [his wife's] sake than his own; it almost killed her every time'. (*MM*, 3) Brierley employs figurative language: agony, dread, killed, to communicate the emotional violence, economic frustration and the enforced conviviality unemployment wreaks upon the erstwhile sacred confines of the mining family's domestic space. Providing the *mise en scene* for Brierley's exploration of 'the psychological states of a very small number of characters locked in a closed world of material circumstances', the euphemism 'Hearth and home' metonymically captures the womb-like, inviolate, sanctuary of the miner's home registering both its restricted dimensions and the suffering family ensconced within.[31]

In the closing pages of the novel, Brierley's narrator describes the Means Test Inspector's visit as a spiritually demeaning and harrowing experience:

> The master and mistress of the household – the two heads of a home – husband and wife in their castle – English. And this man sat here at the table where grace used to be said, where friends used to come and laugh over tea, always on the first Sunday in the year, that nearest to John's Birthday. And this man sat where those friends had sat, he was like a lord and they stood

> trembling before him. No, that wasn't the relation at all, there was something soulless in this, callous. Means Test. It was something else besides a means test, it tested one's soul, one's being and the soul and the being were poorer every time. It could not but leave them worse, disturbing as it did the calm and quietness of the inner life. However far back into one's self one retreated, still the test followed, measuring, measuring. (*MM*, 263)

Employing anaphora ('And this man'), Brierley deconstructs the bourgeois maxim that 'The Englishman's home is his castle' and, deploying his 'gift of irony', communicates the grotesque reversal of fortune whereby, having accessed the domestic inner sanctum, the Means Test Inspector now arrogantly sits at the table, 'where grace used to be said and friends used to laugh over tea,' while they 'stood trembling before him'. (*MM*, 263) In the extract below, the narrator records Jane Cook's abhorrence of such indignities by employing biblical syntax and imagery that posits such encroachment as not far short of sexual violation:

> Her hate was towards those who permitted the sacred veil to be torn down from before any family hearth, baring unto nakedness the minds and souls of those sitting around the fire speaking of things which bound them together. Men in content allowed it to be done to their fellow men, not knowing what they did. Jack was sad about it, his hate was against the big fact that such a system could be. Jane hated her fellow-beings, her husband included, and hate now tainted her whole being. (*MM*, 67)

The contagion of Jane's enmity is self-evident. With four repetitions of the word hate, her feelings are *in extremis*. That unemployment operated to distort the Cooks' domestic and familial relationship is evident in the following passage:

> The chaotic period of adjustment, from 'saving' to 'drawing', from a smooth domestic economy to a bewildering strain to make ends meet, had bared the nerves of man and wife, had weakened them morally. Swear words were much nearer the surface in Jane; they came through Jack with ease now, but only in secret as yet […] they felt better apart, somehow, the knowledge of how, what and where they were did not crowd so closely then – so heavily. Jack was glad of the "signing mornings", of fine days when he could be in the garden or walking about the commons. Jane was relieved, too, to see his back for a while; she could never quite adjust herself to having a man on the hearth continually. (*MM*, 137, 138)

'For better, or for worse, in plenty and in want, in sickness and in health', the Cook's wedding vows must have begun to ring hollow; not only theirs but those many others, who, under similarly straitened circumstances, must have identified with an opportunity to spend some time apart. As Carole Snee remarks:

> Jack's unemployment means that he and his wife are forced by external factors to modify the traditional segregation of roles found in mining communities. They both have to recognise that her love for Jack is partially determined by his ability to provide for her and her child… Love does not conquer all, and is itself revealed as part of the social framework, not something existing outside it.[32]

Despite the implacable anxieties and intrusions of the external world, throughout his tribulations, Jack Cook's overriding concern is to find work:

> [B]ut until the opportunity came, if it ever did, and that doubt had begun to be very insistent […] his mental time must be wholly taken in keeping his little world steady. On the face of it this little world seemed easily capable of being managed, everything was so straightforward, so determined – a fixed rate of income, three human beings to be catered for. (*MM*, 6)

In a further ironic interlude, Brierley's narrator lures us into believing that, viewed objectively, Jack's immediate responsibilities, his 'little world', *ought* not prove too difficult to maintain. However, the word 'seemed' flags up an ironic intervention, for though one might be tempted to agree that everything *seemed* manageable, Brierley's use of past participle serves to undercut the meaning, its intention opposite to that being said.

Asking why the novel became the appropriate form by which to communicate accounts of working-class experience, and what it offered working-class writers that sociological or historical accounts could not, Simon Dentith proposes the answer lies in 'irony'.[33] The novel he believes 'provides as one of its characteristic modes, the use of irony, but that, in part because of this inheritance of irony, it is especially hospitable to a different kind of irony that is in fact a characteristic resource of the speech communities from which the novelists emerge'.[34] Examples of what Dentith described as the bourgeois novel's 'ironic gaze at the delusions of the protagonist' are found in the naïve intellectual aspirations of George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch,* or the hapless Richard Carstone as he attempts to wrest his inheritance from the estate of Jarndyce and Jarndyce in Dickens' *Bleak House,* each illustrative of the 'ironic gaze', undertaken by the 'transcendent' or affirmative narrative viewpoint presented in the nineteenth-century realist text. As Dentith suggests 'this is one of the principal generic possibilities that the novel provides. [This] it may be said, is what novels do'.[35] In describing what he judged 'the characteristic note of working-class writing in the thirties', its 'particular tone of voice', a 'tone of sardonic worldly wisdom often characterised by ironic understatement or by the choice of telling anecdote', Dentith touches on Richard Hoggart's remarks concerning D. H. Lawrence above.[36] Martha Vicinus traces the presence of tone-of-voice and irony in working-class speech patterns

by reference to Music Hall performance, Chartist writing and nineteenth-century Chap books. Vicinus explains that although irony was 'a characteristic resource of working-class speech communities,' whilst viewing it as 'at times debilitating', she was quick to affirm that '[i]ronic distance […] acted as self-protection; life was often desperate enough, but few survived on complaints, and humour proved to be the backbone of a developing class-consciousness'.[37]

Elements of this 'ironic gaze' combine in the following passage in which Brierley's narrator records the myriad purchases one is able to make upon receipt of the meagre sum of twenty five shillings and threepence allowed by the Public Assistance Committee 'Which, after rent, rates and sick club', were also considered sufficient to provide:

> [F]ood, clothes, coal, light and the hundred and one things which are included in the connotation of the term 'a home'. And moreover, the two heads of the household were always on hand to keep the home on the top level of domestic efficiency; never was the bewildered wife presented with a problem which would have to wait until her husband returned from an eight-hour exile at the pit. He was always on hand with advice or help. She was relieved too, from more than half of the practical management of the household, so that she could never justly claim like some wives and mothers in Wingrove that she was a 'slave with not a minute to call her own'. (*MM*, 7)

In what seems almost a parody of the jaunty, third-person Pathe newsreel 'voice-over', Brierley uses self-deprecation, understatement and not a little acerbic wit to register the awkward presence of 'the bewildered wife's' unemployed spouse as he negotiates the enforced conviviality of the homescape, where the traditional segregation of roles noted by Carole Snee is upturned and ironised. Michael Pickering and Kevin Roberts follow Martha Vicinus here by suggesting this process might function as a defence mechanism: 'Ironic humour is in fact a distinctive tone of class and proletarian self-consciousness, expressing moods that range from laconic self-resignation to buoyant self-confidence and pride'.[38] In their discussion of the working-class writer Jack Common, they suggest it was 'precisely this humour and irony that allowed him to explore his own life at a distance and for its generality […] he is just as much interested in the representative nature of his fate as in his own unique and particular circumstances'.[39] Brierley employs these devices to precisely the same effect; a tone of laconic resignation permeates the above passage and undercuts conventional assumptions regarding the respective heads of the household. Like Jack Common, Brierley saw the representational potential of his own experience, for, as with the stand-up comedian's 'observation-humour,' Brierley's verbal irony depended upon readers' mutual recognition of shared circumstance. His rootedness in the mining community and close acquaintance with the depredations of unemployment enabled him to

construct ironies which, if only temporarily, went some way to alleviating the misery of the many like himself having to 'scrape by' on preposterously inadequate state benefits.

Rather than communicating cynicism or humour, the following passage finds Brierley using irony to underline unemployment's darker, more destructive effects. It follows the narrator's explanation of how Labour Exchange officials offered a dispensation to the long-term unemployed whereby they were excused the indignity of 'signing' on a daily basis, provided they sign a document once each week stating they had not worked during the intervening period. The remaining days of the week were then 'their own', to do with 'as they pleased'. Irony and tone-of-voice again point up the sheer waste of human potential. In mapping their descent toward 'disintegration and crisis', the following passage, far from celebrating a sense of liberation or release, reveals how the unemployed workers' unstructured days provide only more opportunity for anxiety and dark introspection as the inability to provide for their families becomes internalised as personal failure:

> The rest of the time they were free, free to work in their homes and gardens, free surreptitiously to earn a few bob or two working for other folks (until some swine reported them and they were either summoned or had a week or two's money stopped), free to be nagged at all day long by a petulant wife, free to feel the pride they had in a home and children becoming attenuated until it disappeared altogether and one of the two qualities, indifference or an enduring poignancy, was bared, free to brood with want around them, frightened by visions of the river, the canal, the reservoir ; sometimes seeing an awful significance in the strong arm of a tree, the hook in the ceiling, the razor they shave with; having to hurry to the fields to breathe deeply, firmly, there to curse and swear not only at external things but the foolish weakness of themselves. (*MM*, 131)

The iterations of 'free' in this passage are set against the unemployed miners' embarrassment of spare time where irony is clearly manifest in the opposite of what is said, as they were never wholly free from anxiety. A markedly less-than-liberating experience, unemployment is the condition of 'unfreedom,' especially for individuals enmeshed within the capitalist mode of production where, as Marcuse suggests 'cultural values as well as the physical and psychological powers of men have become commodities […] The situation of the Labour market is what directly determines the freedom of men and the possibilities of life, and is always dependent on the dynamics of society as a whole'.[40] Once severed from the all-pervasive labour market there is simply and abruptly nowhere to go. Rather than ironically tracing what Pickering and Robins suggested as the trajectory from 'laconic resignation to buoyant self-confidence', the mood descends from a tone of cheery resignation to one of grim foreboding.[41] In his discussion of the mining novel, Graham Holderness remarks upon the hazards of the coalface describing how,

'Each "little thing", each minute detail of empirical observation, contains a strange otherworld of dark anxiety and existential terror […] the naturalistic surface is constantly fracturing to disclose these underground fears'.[42] Paradoxically, even when 'out of work' and 'released' from the ardours of this gruelling and dangerous occupation, there is little opportunity to experience 'freedom' or any sense of emotional respite; the demoralising effects of unemployment merely pushing its victims to deeper and darker levels of introspection.

Moving from linguistically-oriented devices to a wider formal analysis, I want to consider how the stylistic decisions Brierley undertook contribute to his novel's uniqueness. As indicated in the introduction, critics such as John Fordham are keen to stress the dialectical nature of working-class writing and the use of forms 'fundamentally at odds with traditional representational modes' with which they had been commonly and cursorily associated. Fordham illustrates this by reference to Liverpool writer James Hanley but notes this departure from traditional modes was equally evident in Walter Brierley where:

> [T]he episodic and metaphoric nature of [his] works suggests a less realist and more expressionistic level of reading consistent with a perception that human beings are determined by forces external to their individual will. [And that] the narrative focus on a 'means test man' or a 'sandwichman' precisely represents those conditions of unemployment where the social relations of human beings have been reduced to a static or reified state.[43]

The episodic form of *Means Test Man* is relevant here. As I have mentioned, the days of the week prior to the Means Test inspector's visit each focus around a central incident giving rise to psychological reflection on the part of the protagonist. These usually take the shape of 'realisations', or 'awakenings' of consciousness, concerned to contrast their perceived relationship to the 'real world' with the grim realities of their circumscribed existence. By severing one's ties with the working population at large, unemployment functions as a form of social rejection or banishment. Lukacs' theory of *reification* asserts that, owing to industrial capitalism's increasingly specialised methods of production, workers converge with and become mere extensions of the machines they operate, and come to exist as products, objects - ultimately as mere commodities themselves. Demeaning as this was, the term is normally applied to those members of the industrial proletariat 'fortunate' enough to have exchanged their labour for a wage and to remain in full-time employment. During periods of crisis however, employment is often revealed as a less-than-stable proposition, the 'jobless worker' now subjected to psychological humiliations of a different order. Discussing the enormity of the Cook's predicament in *Means Test Man*, Graham Holderness suggests that '[t]heir condition is not simply one of poverty, but one of extreme

alienation' and proposes that 'their experience, if released into the even certainty of the real (bourgeois) world would drive that world to madness'.[44] He considers the effects of long-term unemployment reveal the Cooks to occupy a social and psychological 'double-bind' between their faith in the 'real world' and their existence in the actual'.[45] By denying his right to work, and support his family, unemployment closes down Jack's belief that he holds any stake in his economic destiny. 'No longer', to paraphrase Dickens, 'the hero of his own life', instead a 'commodity', more disconcertingly an 'unmarketable' commodity, Jack Cook's experience exemplifies the final devastating and exquisite consequence of unemployment.

As I have intimated, it is ironic that the cruellest element of unemployment lies in the abundance of free time one is given to contemplate it. In the passage below, Brierley describes the febrile atmosphere in which, with temperaments at breaking point, man and wife walk on-eggshells in the confines of their home. Sunday, once the day of leisure, traditionally a family day and hitherto the destination point of the working week, has now become a day like any other, simply one more to be endured:

> Sunday … Everything was held up the world could do without those workers who were in regular employment even, so there was no hope for those who were seeking it. Hope was foolishness on this day, optimism mere futility, nothing to do but sit and wait for it to pass; a dangerous day, too, when a moment's weakness might lead to the very core of domestic accord being poisoned or ripped away. (*MM*, 66)

To escape the tedium, Jack and his son embark on a long walk, their route passes the pithead buildings of the colliery where Jack had been employed for ten years prior to his lay-off. Here, lying squat and huddled together, the engine houses, blacksmiths' and joiners' shops that comprise this industrial landscape are found in their Sunday longueurs, and where, in the manner of Auden's 'Who stands, the crux left by the watershed', they seem to rebuke the complacent observer by communicating some deeper significance.[46] Besides providing an appropriate backdrop to Jack's ensuing reverie, Brierley's anthropomorphic description of the colliery buildings has a similar effect upon Jack:

> A hate was warming him, sickening him, its source some vague sense of loss. He had worked there ten years, the place was part of him, he was part of the place. In was an eagerness, a willingness to go back, to live with it again, but there was no room for him there. It rejected him. Such was infinitely worse than love rejection, this was being rejection, the denial of the activity, the pleasure, the whole richness of life, health, security, independence. (*MM*, 87)

Jack's social isolation transcends even the indignities of reification and finds Brierley groping to articulate his protagonist's 'vague sense of loss'. 'In the social orientation of [his] labours, the deployment of skills and expenditure of effort' Jack had evidently derived satisfaction from 'the forms of objectification provided by work', and defining himself in these terms had been a positive experience.[47] Nevertheless, whilst Brierley's narrator depicts Jack's unemployment in terms of a broken relationship, unemployment proves worse than 'love rejection'. Unable to rationalise it as a social, 'shared condition' rather than personal failing, Jack internalises his situation interpreting it as the wholesale denial and rejection of his very being. Effectively ostracised from society – or rather, a society organised around the capitalist relations of production symbolised by the impassive, pithead buildings – the language of Jack Cook's reverie is consonant with the reified consciousness described by Fordham in which:

> [T]he experience of reification determines its use of figurative language and the non-realist quality of its forms. Thus the writing itself, while it is often grounded in an ostensible realism, will nonetheless adopt descriptive or allegorical modes in which meaning does not so much depend upon a realist plausibility, but on a symbolic or metaphoric representation of a 'reified' consciousness.[48]

Describing a 'real world explicitly differentiated from the experience of the unemployed', Graham Holderness attributes the Cooks' predicament to the fact that '[they] occupy a peripheral dimension of extreme deprivation, watching the world from behind a barrier of separation' and cites the following passage in which Brierley's narrator focalises the wider implications from Jane Cook's perspective:

> [T]hey were penned in a small space in the world like a lot of cattle and were provided with what was thought enough for them. Thousands of harassed men, women and children were penned with them, beings with no independence, no freedom, underfed, underclothed, not trusted. (*MM*, 55)

Jane's use of such terms as 'penned in' and 'pinion' (the clipping of a bird's flight feathers in order to keep it captive), combine with the 'cattle' simile and other metaphorical representations to underline the impoverishment of the unemployed. Such figurative imagery appears later in the novel as Brierley tracks the Cooks progressive dehumanisation by likening them to bacteria or microbial spores, 'They were like plants and animals, like any sort of life which existed where the wind blew bleakly all the time, stunted, without nature, of no use to the world'. (*MM*, 269)

Brierley's use of imagery derives from intense psychological introspection; here 'the violent emotions welling up from the innermost recesses of the subconscious' is characteristic of

expressionism's hostility to the conventions of the realist novel viewed as the literary manifestation of bourgeois ideology.[49] Brierley's 'escape from traditional realist convention' is shown in both linguistic experimentation and the psychological delineation of character. The untrammelled anger with which Jack and Jane Cook react to their predicament moves from stolid realism towards the expressionistic depictions of reality he discovered in Lawrence. As Peter Nicholls suggests 'Like the Cubists, the Expressionists were interested in arriving at unfamiliar images of the world through calculated images of distortion.'[50] While assenting to John Fordham's caution that such pronouncements 'rel[y] on an understanding of modernism as a gradual and emergent discourse within the 'realist text', one might play devil's advocate and posit the view that the distorted imagery with which his characters voice their dissatisfactions stemmed more from Brierley's wish to emulate Lawrence than to subvert or break with the constraining influence of the traditional realist mode.

As a provisional, 'working' definition of Expressionism, Kristian Sotriffer proposes:

> [Expressionism's] underlying characteristic […] consists of an over-intensification of experience, a rejection of the classical canon, a distortion and exaggeration bordering on the hysterical, a shattering of traditional forms and the reordering of fragments to make vehicles for changed thinking and sensation, and a new, more critical and empathic approach to the world.[51]

Such iconoclastic intensifications and figurative distortions were anathema to Lukacs who took issue with Naturalism, Expressionism and subsequent modernist modes, believing that 'emotionally and intellectually the modernist schools remain frozen in their own immediacy; '[failing] to pierce the surface to discover the underlying essence; the real factors that relate their experiences to the hidden social forces that produce them'.[52] Rather than simply reflecting the despair and futility of bourgeois existence, Lukacs believed the artist must penetrate history's superficial, surface appearance to comprehend instead the totality of the social processes ordering contemporary capitalist society.

Such expressionistic renderings of experience naturally invoke the figure of D. H. Lawrence who, as intimated in the introduction, exerted a powerful hold on the imaginations of the Birmingham group writers, especially Brierley, Allen and Hampson. Andy Croft indicates 'there was no readily available, familiar, native, national, working-class literary tradition to which they could see themselves belonging. All they had was D. H. Lawrence'.[53] This was not without irony, according to Andrew Harrison, although having established a reputation as a 'regional' and by connotation, working-class author:

> Lawrence's first instinct was *not* to produce social realist works like 'Odour of Chrysanthemums' and *Sons and Lovers*. It was only at the instigation of his early mentors Ford Madox Hueffer and Edward Garnett, who had an eye to literary commerce, that Lawrence began documenting Eastwood life and reproducing the routines, speech patterns and mannerisms of the mining community.[54]

However, the correspondence between Brierley, Hampson and Allen held by Derby local Studies Library, while invaluable in detailing their collaboration, also testifies to Lawrence's status as their literary mentor. In a letter dated the 11th September 1934, Allen informs Brierley he would forward him a copy of the unexpurgated American edition of *The Rainbow* adding 'as you'll see, it is a copy pinched from a circulating library, a most respectable place. They'd got it in the window. I realised that they couldn't possibly know the book was banned, so I thought I'd relieve them of harbouring such unpleasant stuff'.[55] In a further letter, Allen comments that although it was some years since he read it, '*The Rainbow* was probably the best of D.H.L. […] the great scene is probably the chapter towards the end of the book where the girl is chased by the horses. Seems to me the greatest piece of imaginative writing since Dostoievsky [sic]'.[56] The following extract from a letter written of 11th November 1934 reveals the extent to which Brierley had imbibed elements of the Lawrencian metaphysic:

> If I understand you rightly, you are interested primarily in – here I fumble for words – the mystery of the human heart, the deep instinctive feelings, the springs of action. The dark mysteries. The essence of things. I belive [sic] I see quite clearly what you mean, but it's difficult to express. It means your affinities are really with Lawrence – as John has already pointed out – and with Wordsworth. You are interested at the point where life begins to show itself. Am I getting near?[57]

In an earlier letter Allen had promised to send Brierley an unexpurgated copy of *The Rainbow* and in a further letter he refers to the expressionistic final scene of the novel in which Ursula was chased by the horses.[58]

Allen believed himself conditioned to admire Lawrence, '[h]is upbringing and social background were close enough to mine to make it almost inevitable that I should identify with him. He was a working-class boy with no advantages except his talent'.[59] That John Hampson was equally enamoured of the Nottinghamshire writer is evident in his correspondence with Brierley. In a letter dated 27th July 1934 a perplexed Hampson informs Brierley that '*Brothers and Lovers* (the American imprint of his *Strip Jack Naked)* arrived from New York this morning: on the wrapper I am described as the heir apparent to D. H. Lawrence. I am looking forward to the

American reviews with curiosity'.[60] As the Brierley correspondence with Walter Allen and John Hampson reveals, all three were votaries at the shrine of D. H. Lawrence, Brierley perhaps moreso for – in terms of his geographical location in the East Midland coalfield, social status and class mobility – Lawrence clearly functioned in the dual roles of local hero and literary mentor. Whilst powerful, the Lawrencian influence has nonetheless overshadowed Brierley's reputation. For, rather than studiously emulating Lawrence, Brierley's accounts of colliery experience were based on his lived experience *as* a collier.[61] Conscious that there was 'something more to life than the pit, Brierley's stories and novels deconstruct the heroic mythology of masculine labour. Fearful of death or personal injury, Brierley describes the harsh, energy-sapping realities of pit work as only one accustomed to its ardours could.

Despite Lukacs' discouraging assessment of modernist modes, there are episodes in *Means Test Man* where Brierley's writing clearly maps onto Kristian Sotriffer's definition of Expressionism and supports John Fordham's view that:

> In the interests of accurate documentation of conditions, [proletarian] writing, although relying on established codes of realism, discloses the influences of European modernism, in which narrative movement is towards isolation, disintegration and crisis rather than towards [realism's] affirmative resolution.[62]

While often characterised as social or documentary realists confined, possibly condemned, to writing within the parameters of the dominant representational form, Brierley's, and indeed Birmingham group fictions in general, kicked against the restraining and affirmative traces of traditional realism and, as we shall discover, were by no means unresponsive to experimentation and innovation. Again, as Fordham suggests:

> In working-class writing, the bourgeois novel's convention of internal focalisation will be replaced by a figural representation of consciousness […] This is why the category of "realism" is not always an adequate means of analysing the working-class novel: its formal properties often derive from models or traditions outside the literary mainstream.[63]

Rather than following the narrow prescriptivism of socialist realism or simply decanting the content of his experience into the readily available modes of naturalism or traditional bourgeois realism, Brierley's account of the Cook's tribulations deploys a range of formal devices to further his indictment of contemporary social policies. Though not engagé or 'progressive' and declining, possibly unable, to offer any practical 'political solution' to the depredations wrought by long-term unemployment or the intrusive iniquity of the Means Test, Brierley's novel was, as evident from contemporary reviews and sales, successful in communicating the dispiriting and

debilitating experience of unemployment to a wider public and also to fostering a greater awareness of the iniquities endured by the working-classes under the Means Test that ultimately led to its abolition in 1941.[64]

The somewhat reluctant assimilation of Brierley's novel into the contemporary pantheon of working-class writing, due to its perceived lack of political commitment, can in retrospect be seen to have 'thrown the baby out with the bath water'. Far from being a naïve attempt to emulate realist or naturalist narrative *Means Test Man* is, on the contrary, a carefully constructed and confidently ambitious work. In its amalgamation of traditional and modernist modes, Brierley's distinctive 'manner of speaking', his 'tone of voice' and the wealth of psychological insight he brings to the novel, reveal it as a significant and powerful intervention in the working-class canon.

It was their short stories that initially drew the Birmingham group writers to the attention of Edward O'Brien who saw how their conception of the short form broke with an earlier tradition he felt was inclined to 'the 'pretty' and 'wistful', at its best 'a Georgian lyric that remained unaware of its own time and inhibited from social contact beyond that of its own class'.[65] Acknowledging that the poets 'Auden, Day-Lewis and Spender wish[ed] to come out of the ivory tower and to have strong social sympathies', O'Brien sensed 'some shyness, some fear, from walking along the road for an hour in happy conversation with a tramp or a sailor prevented them'.[66] The middle-class writers' tentative fraternisation with the workers, what Steve Ellis refers to as a 'privileged pseudo-proletarianism', or Frank Kermode's somewhat depressing observation that, their sincere motivations aside, 'the company of middle-class friends was more congenial' did not, as O'Brien rightly saw, prevent the writers of the Birmingham group from crossing such barriers, though in terms of their proximity to working-class experience and their own class origins, it would be more accurate to say there were far fewer barriers to surmount.[67] In the reading that follows, I examine John Hampson's modernist treatment of the short-story, which in echoing John Fordham's remarks above, rather than tracking the realist trajectory to resolution and closure, the modernist short story's narrative movement is toward isolation, disintegration and crisis.[68]

Written five years before Auden's 'September 1, 1939', John Hampson's 'Man About the House' offers itself as an illustration of that poem's aphoristic lines 'Those to whom evil is done/Do evil in return.' Rather than merely restating this regrettable truism, Hampson's exploration of a family enduring the stresses of unemployment probes beneath the trauma of immediate circumstance to reveal the external inertias informing its protagonist's behaviour. The

fact that the story's principle characters are often addressed as 'the Man', or 'the Woman' and that the boy remains unnamed throughout, gesture towards the 'universality' H. E. Bates perceived in the short form and imbues Hampson's story with a parabolic or fabular quality.[69] The modern short-story's intrinsic brevity has led contemporary theorists to consider it a hospitable medium for innovation and experimentation. Adrian Hunter relates how, on finishing Katherine Mansfield's 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel,' one day in 1921, Thomas Hardy assumed there would be a sequel. He didn't recognise the ending as an ending, or the story as complete in itself.'[70] Hunter says 'Hardy's bafflement was by no means unusual, but reflect[ed] the extent to which this new species of story ran against the precepts and expectations readers customarily brought to a piece of narrative fiction'.[71] Hunter touches upon an important element here, for contemporary innovations in both the novel and short-story were specifically aimed to disrupt the expectations established by the conventions of bourgeois realism.

In its detailed focus upon a single scene or event analogous to the Victorian narrative painting, the modern short-story allows little if any space for the creation or dissolution of enigma found in conventional narrative, as Ian Reid suggests:

> [T]he action of a short story […] need have no completed pattern at all. It may be virtually without start or finish, representing only a state of affairs rather than a sequence of events […] Chekhov himself once remarked: "I think that when one has finished writing a short story one should delete the beginning and the end". In discarding patterns of enclosure [and disclosure] the short-story writer can perhaps discover a freedom and imaginative truth inherent in this genre.[72]

It is unsurprising that the short form has been considered ideally suited to capturing the fragmentary and fleeting experience of modernity. In its absence of plot, its focus on a single incident and 'resistance to closure or completion', Hampson's *Man About The House* breaks with the affirmative inertia of 'conventional cultural and signifying systems' and moves closer to the modernist short-story as defined by Dominic Head.[73] Contrary to Edgar Allan Poe's *unifying* effects, Head suggests it is the modern short-story's use of *disunifying* effects such as irresolution that provide a more comprehensive definition of the contemporary form which, despite a seeming lack of closure nevertheless '[makes] its point in a closed, manageable narrative period' and is clearly complete.[74] Rather than delivering the comforting assurance of a resolution, John Hampson's story 'repudiat[es] conventional fictional representations of experience' and though ostensibly naturalistic in terms of its content, is shown to display formal characteristics of a decidedly modernist tendency.[75] In order to locate the political force of the modern short-story, Head proposes we apply Althusser's concept of 'relative autonomy' which 'involves seeing the

disruptive literary gesture […] as something which is simultaneously conditioned by, yet critical of its ideological context, a context which can be equated with literary conventions and whatever world-view they encompass'.[76] Simply put, Althusser conceives the artwork as an ideologically privileged form of knowledge independent of *conventionally constructed discourse* and, as such, is capable of questioning the received wisdoms *of* this discourse. Dominic Head indicates that in the 'Letter In Reply To Andres Despre', Althusser 'outlines the concept of relative autonomy in art'.[77] Asserting he '[does not] *rank real art among the ideologies*, although art does have a quite particular and specific relationship with ideology', Althusser accords art a privileged status which (in the case of literature) enables the reader 'to '[*see*]', '[*perceive*]' and '[*feel*]' the *ideology* from which it is born, in which it bathes and from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it *alludes*'.[78] He illustrates his point by reference to the works of Balzac and Solzhenitsyn, as he tells Despre:

> Balzac and Solszenitsyn [sic] give us a view of ideology to which their work alludes and with which it is constantly fed, a view which presupposes a *retreat*, and *internal distantiation* from the very ideology from which their novels emerged. They make us 'perceive' (but not know) in some sense *from the inside*, by *an internal distance*, the very ideology from which they are held (original emphasis).[79]

John Fordham approaches this discussion by way of the 'textual class struggle […] determined by an essentially oppositional stance and [the] immanent social critique' he discovers in the work of James Hanley. Fordham cites Theodor Adorno's notion of the artwork's '*dual essence'* as something that is 'ideological through and through and at the same time, because of its autonomy, that which criticises society in its very being' (my emphasis).[80] Privileging aesthetic autonomy over ideology, Adorno's conception closely resembles Althusser's notion of 'relative autonomy.' Fordham unpicks Adorno's theory further:

> Art for its continuing existence, depends upon the economic and institutional dissemination of its products, and thus preserves the status quo in its collusion with commodity fetishism. Yet, because of its aesthetic identity as 'truth content' it functions as essentially autonomous from, as non-identical with, the empirically real world of commodities and thus in implicit opposition to it.[81]

Applying Althusser's concept of relative autonomy' to Hampson's short-story, we begin to appreciate how, while Head cautions against, 'putting too much weight upon so slight a document as the 'Letter on Art', the concept of relative autonomy proves valuable as 'a signpost to the politicising of the aesthetic as a valuable contextual category'."[82] Head continues:

> The dual essence of art – its simultaneous contextual dependence and contextual critique – is only viable if the context can be made available through the text. History, that is to say, has to exist as an extra-textual reality which locates and defines literary production. This may amount to no more than an imperfect reconstruction by the critic, based on a personal period-knowledge, but it is this element of referentiality which redeems the knowledge of art from the 'subjectless discourse of conceptual science' and gives it a context.[83]

The 'dual essence' of 'contextual dependence and contextual critique' appears in Hampson's narrative where economic depression functions as the 'extra-textual reality'. Reuben's frustration and psychological confusion arise from his inability to understand the seeming recalcitrance of a real world operating beyond boundaries of his ideological imaginary. The contradictory nature of Reuben's and Lena's real world experience has implications for the formal element of the story and in this respect they share their condition with the Cooks in Brierley's *Means Test Man* where, as Graham Holderness suggests 'the fact that the social and psychological condition of the characters is defined as one of extreme alienation radically alters the signifying potentialities of the apparently naturalistic style.'[84]

> The man sat still, glowering over his thoughts. Being out of work was no game for a healthy sort of bloke. For eighteen months, now, he'd hung about, doing a bit in the garden, earning infrequent shillings for cutting other people's grass and hedges. Having nothing to do made a man sick and weary, made him feel useless and done for. It was awful being about, getting in Lena's way, now that he had become conscious of her irritation and watched for it to show in her face when he came into the house during the day hours, when he should have been at work. She annoyed him, too, especially the way in which she spoiled the lad. Out of all reason that was. (*MA*, 3, 4.)

Articulated in the idiom of the protagonist by a third-person narrator using free-indirect narrative, this passage communicates the purposelessness and psychological anxiety experienced by the unemployed worker and clearly marks John Hampson's story for inclusion in this chapter. As Carole Snee remarks of Brierley's *Means Test Man,* '[the Cooks] are forced by external factors to modify the traditional separation of conjugal roles […] They both have to realise that [Jane's] love for Jack is partially determined by his ability to provide for her and her child. In charting this process Brierley brings into focus the nature of interpersonal relationships in a capitalist society.'[85] Hampson's protagonists must similarly dispense with idealised or romantic notions to the contrary; their straitened circumstances expose the harsh reality of Carole Snee's observation

that: 'Love does not conquer all, and is itself revealed as part of the social framework, not something existing outside it."[86]

Peopled by just three characters: a mother (Lena), her husband (Reuben) and their (unnamed) son, *Man About The House* centres upon the incident in which Lena confronts her husband in the act of brutally disciplining their son for associating with a group of other boys considered a negative influence:

> "Oh! You brute!" she screamed.
>
> "Can't I leave you alone with the kid for two or three hours without you having to set about him!"
>
> Reuben looked up sullenly. "It's what he's been asking for these last three months, or over. He ain't had enough yet."
>
> "Don't you dare hit him no more!"
>
> He raised the weapon and brought it down three times in quick succession, then stood the boy on his feet and smiled as the woman rushed forward to gather him to her.
>
> "There, there," she comforted, but the boy pulled himself free and stood, still crying and ashamed, striving to rub the tingling smart away with the palms of his hand. (*MA*, 9)

Unfortunately, a 'good hiding' was once considered the panacea for child misdemeanour, and we're told Reuben experienced such beatings at the hands of his own father, its resurfacing here adding weight to psychological theories of behavioural patterning. Undeniably disproportionate given the trivial nature of the boy's misbehaviour, such pre-meditated punishment would be considered abusive today. Nonetheless, without wishing to mitigate or understate its manifest cruelty, the following analysis posits Reuben less as aggressor, more a victim of circumstance and will argue that, read as a moral fable, Hampson's story holds wider social implications and serves as an indictment of the factors informing Reuben's behaviour, its lessons directed to cause rather than effect.

Beyond Reuben and Lena engaging in further recriminations before retiring to sleep, there is little further development in the story; its closing scene merely finds Reuben entering the bedroom and staring solemnly into a mirror by the light of a solitary candle:

> As he stood there, naked, the woman's sleepy voice called: "Blow out that light and come to bed can't you!"
>
> He watched the pale ghost's thin lips twist into a bitter grin, then laughed softly, conscious of his own power and virility. He was still master of his own house; he'd show her something, yet.

> Pinching the hot flame from the wick he yawned.
>
> Getting into bed he lay on his back in the warmth, staring into the glowing blackness, remembering different days.
>
> A warm searching hand came, caressing him gently. Pretty nigh eleven years ago, Lena and himself had cycled over to Frolesworth. She had drunk a glass of stout that night. The bicycles had gone, months back, for what they would fetch.
>
> "Reuben," the woman whispered.
>
> He lay still. Should he make it up again? Let her soothe, comfort, and snare him into sleep?
>
> "Reuben," she whispered again, tightening her hand on him.
>
> "None of that, now," he said roughly. He rolled over and lay, back towards her, staring into darkness. (*MA*, 19)

Just as we observed in Walter Brierley's *Means Test Man* and, as we shall find in Walter Allen's *Innocence Is Drowned*, the psychological damage and nervous anxiety wrought by long-term unemployment are frequently marked by a parallel deterioration in a character's physiognomy. Reuben momentarily ruminates on his features: 'The face looked hard and thin, deep lines marred both mouth and brow'. Here the ardours of unemployment are manifest in a disfigurement not wholly dissimilar to the process of de-industrialisation itself, which Phil O'Brien describes as 'a violent and criminal act, morally wrong and unfair to the people who are its victims; they are literally 'crushed' under the weight of such change'.[87] In Reuben and Lena finding sleep, Hampson's story 'ends' without affirmation, resolution or any indication of how their situation might change for the better. As with Brierley's Cooks, the implication is one of circularity, for until the external circumstances dictating their predicament are transformed, their lives will remain locked in this pattern of behaviour.

Catherine Belsey suggests 'It is these incompatibilities and contradictions within what is taken for granted which exert a pressure on individuals to seek new, non-contradictory subject positions.'[88] Belsey illustrates this by reference to the position of women who are simultaneously produced and inhibited by contradictory discourses: 'Very broadly they participate in the liberal humanist discourse of freedom, self-determination and rationality and at the same time in a specifically feminine discourse of submission, relative inadequacy and irrational intuition.'[89] According to Belsey:

> The attempt to locate a single and coherent subject position within these contradictory discourses, and in consequence to find a non-contradictory pattern of behaviour, can create intolerable pressures. One way of responding to this situation is to retreat from the contradictions and from the discourse itself, to become 'sick' – more women than men are treated for mental illness.[90]

Belsey considers 'women are not an isolated case. The class structure also produces contradictory subject-positions which precipitate changes in social relations not only between whole classes but between concrete individuals within those classes'.[91] Belsey's illustration of 'incompatible and contradictory discourses' holds good for Hampson's short-story. Applying an Althusserian 'symptomatic' reading reveals the contradictory ideology of the contemporary social formation which – while extolling the high moral virtue of the work ethic and the value of family life: the liberal humanist discourse of self-determination and independence, it is ironically this very discourse that prevents Reuben, Lena and their son from achieving its ideals. Simply stated, Reuben's experience of unemployment is 'non-identical' with the societal norm that determines women 'look after the house' while men 'go out to work'. Owing to his inability to fulfil his historically defined role as 'family breadwinner', Reuben is prey to psychological confusions which, as with the women described by Belsey, are manifest in mental ill-health, here the *dis*-ease revealed in the violent attempt to regain his perceived loss of status.

A 'symptomatic' reading of 'Man About The House' would therefore locate it as a modernist text in which political indictment emerges from the tension generated between formal convention and formal disruption. In this respect Hampson's formal method conforms closely to the process Fordham identifies in Hanley's writing where 'The nature of social reality emerges in the dialectical relation between the form of the work of art – for example the bourgeois novel and what in essence negates it, what is non-identical with it and [in which the] representation of the extremes of a particular class experience is an expression of the non-identical: a negation of the affirmative ideology of bourgeois society, expressing what is essentially outside itself'.[92]

Hampson understood that poverty and the sense of failure it engendered exacted an excessively high toll on family relationships. The catharsis enabled by autobiographical writing is a recurring factor in Hampson's narratives and I examine this tendency in his work more fully by reference to Max Saunders' discussion of Michael Reynolds' 'Autobiografiction' in chapter three. However, given Hampson's involvement with the Hogarth press and Bloomsbury, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Virginia Woolf had empathised closely with this aspect of Hampson's writing. Louise DeSalvo explains how, in *To The Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf had attempted to erase the impact of her father's violence by writing about it, and similarly to quell her mother's voice – the one telling her the only proper role for women was to serve men –

which had previously obsessed her. Woolf believed that in writing: 'I did for myself what psychoanalysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long and deeply felt emotion. And, in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest'.[93] In this respect it is possible to consider William Plomer's characterisation of Hampson's novel as a 'case-history' in a more positive light.[94] Rather than having a confessional or exculpatory function, Hampson's story is better read as an indictment of the external pressures imposed upon families by the Means Test or unemployment, and which, to paraphrase Louise DeSalvo, might better be construed as a form of public testimony whereby personal suffering (Hampson's experience of the spiritual and physical debasement brought about by economic impoverishment) is transformed into art.[95]

Arguing that the category of realism was not always adequate to the task of analysing the working-class novel, John Fordham suggested 'the bourgeois novel's convention of internal focalisation will be displaced by figural representations of consciousness, the reified worker transformed into automaton or machine part.'[96] As we saw, this was certainly valid in respect of *Means Test Man*, where 'figural representations' were achieved by distortions at times nearer expressionist than realist practice. However, while formally innovative in this respect, Brierley's narrative technique remained otherwise conventional, the events impinging upon the Cooks' life recounted largely from the standpoint of a single omniscient, third-person narrator. Reading Walter Allen's *Innocence Is Drowned* directly after Brierley's novel, one is immediately struck by the difference in narrative technique. In what remains very much a novel of working-class life informed by perspectives gleaned from 'inside' that community, Allen's status within it as grammar school scholarship boy, university graduate in English literature, habitué of the Birmingham film society, literary critic and novelist, had exposed him to a wider repertoire of literary influence than that of his Birmingham group companions Halward and Brierley. The comparison of Birmingham group authors' underscores the importance of not viewing working-class writers monolithically. Ross McKibbin and Valentine Cunningham each caution against this, likewise Tony Davies who is critical of conceptions which ignore '[T]he highly varied social, ethnic and occupational composition of the working class, the active and continuously productive nature of experience and […] appropriate forms of representation in constantly changing circumstances'.[97] It is to Allen's 'representation' of the 'constantly changing circumstances' of provincial working-class life during the darkening months of the 1930s that I now turn.

As with Walter Brierley's *Means Test Man,* and his own *Blind Man's Ditch*, Allen's first published novel *Innocence is Drowned* is episodic in structure and focuses largely upon the dynamics of a working-class family focalised from the perspective of each of its members during

a three-day period. Its title derives from Yeats' *The Second Coming,* from which, Allen tells us, 'in a gracious and charming letter,' the Irish poet gave his permission to quote. Published late in 1938 against the backdrop of a national psyche barely recovered from the economic downturn of the twenties and now teetering towards a further European conflict, the closing months of the decade witnessed a period of heightened political awareness and anxiety amongst the population at large. E. M. Forster referred to the Post-Munich period in an article titled 'The 1939 state' where, as Steve Ellis indicates, the lower case 's' captures the prevailing sense of political and psychological consternation.[98] As the novel's title suggests, older certitudes could no longer be relied upon; a sense of foreboding hung in the air. Allen records 'The age was seen as either an age of apocalypse as in Yeats' poem or in the grip of an 'obscure malaise' as in Auden's, 'What shall we say of England, this country of ours where no-one is well?'[99] Diluvian imagery was pervasive, Allen suggesting the 'drowning' of innocence whereas, in *Coming Up For Air*, Orwell's George Bowling is presented as a floundering swimmer who, as with Allen's protagonist, laments the change taking place in the world around him asking: 'does anyone who isn't dead from the neck up doubt that there's a bad time coming? We don't even know what it will be, and yet we know it's coming. Perhaps a war, perhaps a slump – no knowing except that it'll be something bad.'[100] Although Lukacs would claim 'richness and profundity of created characters relies upon the richness and profundity of the total social process', contemporary events, far from 'rich or profound' nonetheless provided fertile ground for Walter Allen's imagination.[101] To use a culinary term, his novel *reduced* the nation's social and political anxieties to the more manageable dynamic of a provincial family unit striving beneath the shadow of catastrophe. This process aligns with Raymond Williams' formulation by providing 'a sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in which particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living' and thus captures 'the area of interaction between the official consciousness of an epoch and the whole process of actually living its consequences'.[102] John Hampson describes Allen's literary *modus operandi* as follows:

> Allen's books deal with the provincial scene; they indicate the turmoil existing beneath the dull surface of an industrial town. His three novels *Innocence Is Drowned*, *Living Space* and *Blind Man's Ditch* are concerned with existence in the thirties, his pictures are grim yet lively, for he can see what lies behind the trim undistinguished façade which a provincial town presents to the stranger. Allen takes a small section of the community and shows what happens to them over a short space of time. Among his types are always the bohemian intellectual and the spiv, or would be crook. [103]

As he had told Andy Croft, Allen considered the pre-war decade as 'a great period, a great time for the novel of specific place' and although remaining politically committed throughout his

career, he had been equally 'swayed by aesthetic considerations'.[104] Allen's literary aesthetic at this time consisted of three principal strands. Firstly, the *genius loci* built on familiarity with, and proximity to, the Birmingham working-classes and his wish to represent them in fiction. Secondly, the formal potential he discovered in the 'collective' novel, in which the outlook of a single protagonist or omniscient narrator is substituted for multiplicity of character viewpoints enabling a democratic, plurality of perspective, and thirdly, narrative experimentation, an attempt to emulate in literature the montage techniques, editing, juxtaposition and cross-cutting employed in documentary cinema. Doubtless, such noble aims would have met with the approval of Margaret Storm Jameson. In *Fact*, she set out a theory of documentary writing that stressed the importance of visual presentation, suggesting:

> A well-placed novelist might bring out a double-sided record: one day or one week in the life of a family of five living in one of the wealthier residential districts of the West End (if he or she can find one which has so far forgotten itself as to breed) set down opposite the life during the same length of time of a similar, Paddington, Hoxton Lambeth family. […] As the photographer does, so must the writer keep himself out of the picture while working ceaselessly to present the *fact* from a striking (poignant, ironic, penetrating, significant) angle.[105]

Storm Jameson's comments effectively paraphrase Walter Allen's approach, as he had described it to Andy Croft, and given that Allen self-avowedly sought to appropriate and deploy cinematic effects in his novel, it seems practical to approach *Innocence Is Drowned* by exploring it from a filmic perspective. It is also important to remember Allen's novel was produced within the Jamesian aesthetic of vision, a critical orthodoxy which emphasised a preference for *showing*, rather than *telling*, which, combined with the burgeoning influence of the documentary film and mass-observation movements, exerted a powerful influence on the contemporary novel. Catherine Belsey suggests that in '[e]schewing the subjectivity of Romantic and Victorian periods that had culminated in Eliot and Yeats,' the prose fiction of later years adopted a different perspective whereby 'intrusion by the author comes to seem an impropriety; impersonal narration, 'showing' (the truth), rather than 'telling' it, is a requirement of prose fiction by the end of the nineteenth-century'.[106] It was believed that *showing* enabled greater objectivity, detachment and dramatic verity as registered in the abandonment of the 'omniscient', and simultaneously 'intrusive' narrative voice, as witnessed, and often disparaged, in the work of nineteenth-century realist writers. David Lodge notes that 'the Jamesian aesthetic of vision; the preference for 'showing' rather than 'telling' remained dominant in criticism of the novel during the 1920s, thirties and 1940s.'[107] Given Leslie Halward's observation that the Birmingham writers 'met

periodically for the purpose of explaining each to the other where he was wrong' one might speculate this particular debate became a heated topic of discussion. Indeed, discussion as to whether, 'showing' provided the panacea for such writerly qualms continued throughout the pre-War decade, though in *Narrative Discourse* (1972), Gerard Genette, would caution against a too credulous enthusiasm:

> [F]rom our own strictly analytic point of view it must be added […] that the very idea of s*howing*, like that of imitation or narrative representation (and even more so because of its naively visual character), is completely illusory: in contrast to dramatic representation, no narrative can "show" or "imitate" the story it tells. All it can do is tell it in a matter which is detailed, precise, "alive," and in that way, give more or less the *'illusion of mimesis'*.[108]

Based upon his artisan father: 'a silversmith's engraver, designer and die-sinker who had spent a year at grammar school - long enough to give him the rudiments of Latin grammar and an insatiable thirst for learning' - we initially encounter Allen's ageing, tubercular and unemployed protagonist Dick Gardiner as he struggles to retain his status as the family patriarch.[109] The novel is loosely threaded by a blackmail plot in which Dick Gardiner's rebellious second son Eric, arrogant and impervious to his father's designs, embarks upon a criminal act. The dramatis personae include: elder son Ralph who is studying at Birmingham's Mason College (later Birmingham University) and is currently in a relationship with the socially sophisticated and superior Monica Craven, a graduate of Newnham College, Cambridge; Sydney, the youngest son who is currently at grammar school and represents his father's last opportunity to exert paternal influence and finally, attempting to hold familial body and soul together: Rose, Dick's hard-working 'doubly oppressed' wife, who takes in ironing to supplement the family's income.

This chapter's focus on unemployment involves wrenching Allen's sick and ageing patriarch, from the confines of the family unit in order to examine the deleterious effects and psychological perturbations which lead to the 'unmaking' of this once craft-proud working-man but also his political reconstitution as, jolted from his innocence and naivete, he comes to appreciate the wider implications of worklessness in the world at large. Set in the second-city slowly lifting itself from the slough of economic depression, Allen's novel portrays a provincial working-class, household worlds apart from Brierley's alienated collier and family out in the Derbyshire coalfield. The distances and differences geographically, occupationally, and educationally, will have major implications for the kind of novel produced.

Birmingham's expansion and economic recovery during the middle period of the nineteen thirties led to an increasing demand for skilled engineering workers. The professions of toolmaking, pattern-making and die-sinking comprised a craft-proud aristocracy conscious of its

own importance.[110] This was not always collectively or socially conducive however, for as Ross McKibbin argues, 'The status-consciousness that accompanied craft-pride undermined working-class *esprit de corps* as much as it did that of any other class.'[111] Having contracted TB owing to long hours as a toolmaker during the Great War, Allen's, sick and unemployed artisan is the embodiment of the type described here by Robert Tressell:

> The skilled artisan does not as a rule take part in such a procession except as a very last resource…And all the time he strives to keep up an appearance of being well to do, and would be highly indignant if anyone suggested that he was really in a position of abject, miserable poverty […] he tries to bluff his betters that he has some mysterious private means of which they know nothing, and conceals his poverty as if it were a crime.[112]

The 'episodes' on which I focus, chart Dick Gardiner's progress from individualistic, craft-proud, patriarch and lead to his consciousness, critique and ultimately moral outrage at the system he perceives as creating and seemingly sanctioning such wastage of human potential.

It is supper time when we first encounter the Gardiner family. Eldest son Ralph is out visiting his girlfriend, while his younger siblings Eric and Sydney sit at the table consuming bread and cheese. Mrs. Gardiner serves up cocoa, while her husband Dick enthusiastically surveys a quantity of wood and quietly muses over his plans to construct a bookcase:

> Now the wood had come he would be able to get to work again. The very sight of it gave new strength and suppleness to his fine fingers. Soon they would be holding a plane again […] When Joe had first promised him the wood he had planned to sell the bookcase […] but now, damned if he'd sell it, people thought because you were out of work you had to do everything for money.(*ID*, 11)

Relating to an earlier conversation between Dick Gardiner and a companion, the narrator's account of Dick's musings communicate obliquely not only the physical and mental atrophy visited upon the workless craftsman but also the rejuvenative nature of creative activity: of being in control and doing something purposive. Capturing both the artisan's craft-pride and independence, it reflects Dick Gardiner's refusal to consider himself a mere commodity or of assessing a product's worth purely in terms of monetary exchange value. 'People thought that because you were out of work you had to do everything for money' thought Dick, 'No; Ralph should have [them]'. (*ID*, 12) Rather than merely realising their nominal exchange value, the bookshelves represent something more than a commodity. [113]

Though not providing the portentous metaphor of Leonard Bast's encounter with them in Forster's *Howards End,* Dick Gardiner's bookshelves nonetheless function symbolically.

Initially envisaged to house Ralph's university text books they function as a metonym for Dick Gardiner's wider academic aspirations. His eldest son, Ralph, is studying at Birmingham University where he is expected to take a first; however, whilst courting and simultaneously intimidated by his girlfriend, Newnham College educated, Monica Craven 'on the rebound' from her troubled relationship with Derek 'the most brilliant man in Cambridge', Ralph is lacking in confidence and displays a strong sense of class inferiority. Monica assumes he will become a schoolmaster, Ralph has different ideas:

> Schoolmaster indeed! He winced at the snob phrase. […] He did not want to be a schoolmaster. He would be an elementary schoolteacher, in the class from which he had sprung. The educational system had transplanted him from elementary school to university by way of the municipal secondary school. If he got a good degree the same process would land him a job in another secondary school. That must be resisted. Now, he wanted only to teach the children of the very poor, those whom the educational system left untouched and unprovided for, who wanted direction and encouragement more than the others. (*ID*, 28)

Ralph sees education in terms of the German concept of *Bildung*: the process of acquiring sharing and giving knowledge back to one's community, a notion he shares with his fictional counterpart Arthur Gardner in Walter Brierley's *Sandwichman*. However, Ralph's noble sentiments are not echoed by his brother Eric who, rather than realising Dick Gardiner's vicarious wish his sons become doctors or schoolmasters, has instead left school at the earliest opportunity taking a position as a jeweller's apprentice. Unmoved by his father's importunity, Eric epitomises teenage rebellion, the relationship between Gardiner senior and his second son articulating the generational dissonance identified by Raymond Williams whereby:

> One generation may train its successor, with reasonable success, in the social character or the general cultural pattern, but the new generation will have its own structure of feeling, which will not appear to have 'come from' anywhere. […] The new generation responds in its own unique ways to the world it is inheriting […] yet feeling its whole life in certain ways differently, and shaping its creative response in a new structure of feeling.[114]

Outwardly aggressive and opinionated, Eric is nevertheless a psychologically complex character: '[N]ot tough and hardboiled but merely potentially so', he, along with Eugene Lorimer in *Blind Man's Ditch,* represents the amateur criminal types John Hampson considers are stock characters in Allen's fiction, each standing as figurations of the wider evil permeating existence in the closing months of the 1930s.

As we discover, Dick Gardiner's 'pride' precedes his 'fall'. Temporarily buoyed by his recovered self-esteem, Dick's reverie continues as he recalls his recent misfortunes with the following passage beginning to answer Beales and Lambert's question: 'When a man loses his job, how long does he continue looking hopefully for a new one?' Dick's experience is representative of that shared by thousands in the real world, and here Allen's narrator communicates the tribulations and indignities confronting those seeking work:

> During his illness the thought of the tramp looking for work day after day had been agony to him; almost he had not wanted to get well again, going over the continual rebuffs he had met with and, worse still the discouraged talk of the men hanging around the factory gates. 'They don't want us old 'uns any longer.' They all said that. (*ID*, 16)

As we saw in his correspondence with Walter Brierley, John Hampson stressed the need to 'make capital of each and every difference between the state of the man in employment and the man workless,' Allen shared in this exchange and was doubtless a beneficiary of Hampson's advice. Here Allen contrasts the rejuvenating effects of creative activity with Dick's negative experience of unemployment and, as the opening scene develops, his narrator provides further access to Dick's sanguine imaginings, where, his equilibrium partially restored, more positive thoughts emerge:

> Suddenly, gazing at the smoothly planed planks, the future seemed easy and obvious to Mr. Gardiner. It was absurd to have despaired so long. New strength was in him; he felt ill no longer; his fingers ached to be at their labour. If he felt as well tomorrow he knew he would get a job. […] He sat up and leaned forward, elbows on the arm of his chair. His eyes shone brightly. It was urgent that they [his family] should share his joy and satisfaction. (*ID*, 17)

As further potentialities reveal themselves, we move from Dick's internalised imaginings to a formal, though emptily optimistic, declaration:

> 'I reckon we'll soon be in calm weather,' he said. The words poured out excitedly. 'As soon as I get my strength back we'll be in calm weather. I'll get a job then.' His hands gesticulated. 'We'll move out of this lousy dump, into a decent neighbourhood. He jerked his thumb viciously at the wall. "We'll say goodbye to old Creeping Jesus next door, we'll…'
>
> '*You won't get another job* (my italics).
>
> Mr. Gardiner stopped. Eric was sitting there, grinning sarcastically, his smile a smile of malicious triumph. 'Who d'you think's going to give you a job?'

> Mr. Gardiner's mouth was dry. "That's not the way to speak to your dad," cried Mrs. Gardiner. "For two pins I'd give you a hiding old as you are!" Mr. Gardiner clutched at the arms of his chair, his legs weak again, as though decomposing into fluid. The boy smiled his twisted grin, hugging the secret within him. He was in good humour with himself and the world. "Aw nuts!" he said. For a moment there was silence. Mr. Gardiner stared in front of him. Weariness flooded his whole being. *Saying a thing like that in front of young Sydney*. He tried to speak, but no words came. He felt suddenly old, and the tears formed behind his eyes. His heart fluttered. *Saying a thing like that!* Mrs. Gardiner spoke quietly: "Sydney, go to bed, I'll see to your books." Silently, shamefacedly, the boy edged from his chair. "Good night all," he said, feeling his voice go high and strangled. Nobody answered. (*ID*, 18)

At the outset of this passage, Dick Gardiner's hopes for better times were internalised. His thoughts rendered as they presented themselves. However, between these snatches of dialogue, Allen's narrator uses a restricted diegetic mode to recount the 'manner' in which Dick Gardiner's words are spoken: 'the words poured out excitedly,' 'his hands gesticulated,' but declines from offering comment or judgement upon them. Though providing a literary rendering of mimesis, as Genette indicates, the notion of 'showing' remains 'illusory' because the sequence of events continues to be registered *verbally,* whereas in a film such paralinguistic detail would be communicated by close up, 'zooming in', to reveal the speaker's actions as a bystander might observe them.

Typographically set-off from the remainder of the passage, the line '*You won't get another job'* abruptly silences Dick Gardiner's enthusiastic reveries, the absence of the *he/she said* (epic-preterite) contrives to make the interjection seem unattributed, as though appearing from nowhere. As the sting of the remark fades, external focalisation reveals Eric as its originator, again using the restricted diegetic mode, his guilt is revealed purely by reference to his facial expression 'sitting there grinning sarcastically, his smile a smile of malicious triumph'. The line gives the reader an insight into Eric's personality, the cynical, threatening tone and the brusque reference to his father in the second person, are each indicative of disrespect and congruent with Allen's subsequent development of his character. Eric's rebuttal is doubly insensitive: initially, by being uttered just at the moment when Dick Gardiner was beginning to think more positively, and also owing to its utterance in the dining room; the family hearth, the otherwise inviolate womb of the working-class household normally considered a sanctuary from such harsh external realities.

Eric's words certainly have an unsettling effect and the narrative focus returns to his father. Again his reactions are relayed purely by 'showing' his physical response: 'Mr. Gardiner clutched at the arm of his chair, his legs weak again as if decomposing into fluid'. (*ID*, 18)

Though clearly shocked by Eric's outburst, Mrs. Gardiner has calmed a little, and encourages Sydney the youngest son to go to bed. Again, Allen's narrator registers the fact that she 'spoke quietly,' which, by describing the *manner* in which she spoke, is appropriate to situating her as the long-suffering and dutiful matriarch charged with pouring oil upon the troubled waters of family conflict. The most curious line in the passage is the italicised: *Saying a thing like that in front of young Sydney*. Representing Dick Gardiner's internalised, unvoiced feelings they emphasise the enormity of Eric's remark, unable to speak and sticking all the more firmly in Dick's craw due to this 'public' humiliation; Eric's words not only undermine Dick Gardiner's role as family patriarch but are no less-barbed because they contain an inescapable kernel of truth. As if to underline the febrile tensions of this dinner-table, 'domestic', matters culminate in what the narrator describes as Sydney's 'shamefaced discomfort' and the 'strangled pitch' of his voice as he says his goodnights.

As the novel progresses, Dick Gardiner gradually comes to perceive that 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold'.[115] Too old, sick and powerless to effect any change, Dick's 'innocence is drowned', his once haughty demeanour eroded as he reconciles himself to unemployment. His realisation is cemented when he moves beyond the sanctuary of the domestic homescape to the public sphere of the Central Library reading room. Sheltered from the elements and providing warmth and companionship, it is here that, confronted with the degradations suffered by his ageing and defeated contemporaries, the foundations of Dick's hubris are shaken and he throws in his lot with his fellow men.

Glancing disinterestedly at a copy of *The Tatler,* his usual reading matter having been appropriated by one of the unemployed and dozing denizens of the library reading room, Dick Gardiner peruses photographs of upper-class 'society' lounging on the Riviera:

> [P]ictures of ladies and gentlemen in evening dress posed in restaurants with bottles in buckets at their feet ; a full-page picture of a girl holding a Scots terrier – "Miss…, lovely daughter of Captain and Lady…, one of the season's most popular debutantes" ; pictures of ladies and gentlemen in bathing costumes lying under the Riviera sun. Resentment smouldered in Mr. Gardiner. He turned hastily to the advertisements and saw a picture of a proud lady in a fur coat and a prouder lady head thrown back and breasts jutting triangularly forth, wearing somebody's corsets. He glanced about : putting a paper like that in a public library seemed to him a bloody insult. The man next to him snored gently. Mr. Gardiner looked at him. His head was placed in his folded arms that lay in a loop on the table. His old bowler hat tipped forward showed a mat of thick white hair. He had a piece of red rag around his neck. A sweetish sickly smell came up from his body. Cautiously Mr. Gardiner peeped under the table. The man had no socks and was

> wearing a pair of broken brogues ; under a toe-cap a dirt-encrusted toe protruded coyly. (*ID*, 161,162)

Presented in chopped fragments, the clipped, telegraphic style of Dick's reading mimics his perfunctory scanning of the society magazine and registers his indifference to its frivolous material. Allen uses free indirect speech to render his thoughts: '[P]utting a paper like that in a public library seemed to him a bloody insult', and uses typographical ellipses ironically as though suggesting why bother to read further? 'Resentment smouldered in Mr. Gardiner. He turned hastily to the advertisements and saw a picture of a proud lady in a fur coat and a prouder lady with head thrown back and breasts jutting triangularly forth, wearing somebody's corsets'. The pronoun 'somebody's' again indicative of his lassitude. The images of bathing costumes, fur coats and lingerie that fill the pages of the magazine represent a world wholly inaccessible to Dick Gardiner and his class. Such images doubtless reverberated in Dick Gardiner's own psyche, Allen juxtaposes Dick's wife – ground down by a lifetime's hard work, and forced by ill-circumstance to take in ironing – against Mrs. Gamble the fortunate wife of a local accountant who drinks orange juice for breakfast, stays in bed until midday and whose gowns and silk lingerie form the basis of Rose's workload.

Unlike the cross-class montage provided in the photo-essays of *Picture Post*, *The Tatler* was directed towards a middle- and upper-class readership in which celebrities, investment bankers and aristocrats sat side by side. Recoiling angrily at the magazine's fawning adulation of these over-indulged socialites, Dick considers the magazine's very existence an affront to the dignity of the beaten and defeated humanity he finds in the reading room. As Lara Feigel observes:

> The contrasting of rich and poor through montage came to dominate both Russian and German cinema in the late 1920s and was used explicitly in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) where […] the beleaguered, dehumanised mass of dark-clothed workers is juxtaposed with the upper classes, dressed in white and frolicking in the sun.[116]

In the remaining lines of the 'Library' scene, Allen continues to emulate cinematic effects and changes of narrative viewpoint to register Dick Gardiner's anger as he contrasts the images of these rich socialites with the indignities suffered by members of the unemployed working-class. Again the sequence beginning 'The man next to him snored gently' and culminating in […] 'a dirt encrusted toe protruding coyly' provides a graphic image and owes much to Allen's Sunday evenings spent at the Birmingham Film Society, where he absorbed the lessons of Eisensteinian shock montage. Emulating the techniques of documentary cinema, Allen's Dick Gardiner functions as the novel's camera eye and centre of consciousness. By contrasting the lives of the

privileged classes with the destitute habitués of the library reading room, Allen engages his readers as active participants in the construction of the novel's political meaning and in so doing reveals his solidarity with the downtrodden. The formal procedures of montage technique used in his literary 'screening' of the disparity between elite and subordinate classes is thus revealed as a deeply political act. As with Brierley, the absence of prescriptive or overtly political rhetoric in Allen's novel is not to condemn it as apolitical. Indeed, despite the tendency towards political or sectarian prescriptivism current in the contemporary and later criticism of working-class writing, a more helpful approach is to be found in the Marxist concept of 'objective partisanship'. In his correspondence with Minna Kautsky, Frederick Engels explained:

> He was by no means averse to fiction with a political 'tendency' but that it was wrong for an author to be *openly* partisan. The political tendency must emerge unobtrusively from the dramatised situations; only in this indirect way could revolutionary fiction work effectively on the bourgeois consciousness of its readers.[117]

A more expansive account of a literary work's socio-political function (or message), is to be found in the writings of Theodor Adorno. Informed by the notion of negative dialectics which proposes the significance of autonomous art lies in its 'functionlessness', Adorno doubts the efficacy of a literary work to communicate an overt social message – especially the kind of engagé writing promoted by Sartre in *What is Literature*? – believing instead that the inclusion of 'propositional content' resulted in the artwork's aesthetic being subsumed beneath 'a superior universal concept': its message, with the consequence that the literary text came to resemble less an artwork than a philosophical treatise'.[118] Adorno held that the 'rudiments of external meaning are the irreducibly non-artistic elements in art. Its formal principle lies not in them but in the dialectic of both moments – which accomplishes the transformation of meanings within it.'[119] Rather than freighting his narrative with authorial commentary therefore, Allen's 'cinematic realism' presents the conflicts and opposing realities of the contemporary social-divide 'non-propositionally'; his novel's critique emerging, as Engels proposed, 'unobtrusively from the dramatised situations,' and, as Adorno suggests, in 'the dialectic of both moments' within the work itself, allowing the ideas presented to speak for themselves.[120] The fact that Allen's particularly 'visual' mode of representation was successful in communicating this dialectic also enabled his readers to position themselves within the frame of his story, as though witnessing events first hand; in this way he was able to generate an affective response, as attested by such early reviewers as Wilfred Gibson who considered Allen gave 'an utterly convincing picture of a working-class family' and Edwin Muir who perceived 'the writing is so transparent, the

observation so unexaggerated, that *we seem to be seeing everything with our own eyes.* And what we see in these few figures is the life of a whole class' (my emphasis).[121]

Though formally innovative, the naturalist genre with which working-class literature has often been associated met with criticism from Western Marxists such as Lukacs on the grounds that 'by restricting itself *exclusively* to the faithful reproduction of immediate reality [it] robbed literature of its power to give a living and dynamic picture of the essential driving forces of history'.[122] While Lukacs' conception of the totality is relevant to those epochs in which the *momentous* events of history unfurled themselves, it overlooks the fact that certain epochs were *less momentous* than others. As we have seen the early years of what came to be known as the 'low dishonest decade' were not always conducive to producing 'the richness and profundity of the total social process' Lukacs desired; the working-class' confrontation with immediate circumstance in the shape of unemployment presented something of an imaginative barrier. Andres Gorz uses the metaphor of an Army to highlight the difficulty of understanding the totality from a position within it:

> Seen from the summit, an army resembles an intelligent animal with a single head, commanding thousands of arms and legs. But the animal does not exist for itself. The unit commanders and individual soldiers are ignorant of both the overall strategic plan and the entire movement of the army. All that they know are the orders and local, partial movements whose overall meaning escapes them.[123]

Touching on the ideological impulse informing what he terms the 'Myth of Collective Appropriation', Gorz' asserts that '[I]t is impossible to see the overall process in its entirety and to get the overall goal that is built into the workings of this gigantic machinery internalised by each individual and reflected in everyone's work. And this impossibility has, of course, been deliberately created in order to guarantee capitalist domination.'[124]

In the oft quoted opening lines from Dickens' *David Copperfield,* the young David speculates '[w]hether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show'.[125] Dickens was fortunate in this respect and, alongside contemporaries such as Tolstoy and Balzac, he was able to become the hero of his own life. These pages have revealed that the exercise of individual agency was not always an option for authors and protagonists of the narratives discussed here, nor likewise the working-classes they depicted. Referencing Robert D. Putnam's and Shaylyn Garrett's *The Upswing* (2020), Martin Kettle explains 'the 1950s [represented] the swelling summit in the middle of the 'I-We-I' bell curve of American life between the economic free-for-all of the 1890s, the era of greater co-

operation mid-20th century, and the turbo-charged renewal of individualism, inequality and partisanship of the 2020s'.[126] As the trope has it, what happens in America sooner or later surfaces here. Indeed the 'we' summit of Britain's socio-political, bell-curve might be said to have arrived following the tranche of social reforms issuing from the 'post-war consensus'. As with America, the mid-20th century social agitation evident in Britain included the voices of minorities who, driven less from self-seeking or individualistic motives, or believing they possessed sole-agency rights to alienation, merely expressed a desire for inclusion and the wish to avoid falling further. In a recent TV interview, ex-President Barack Obama outlined the historical, zig-zag progression of American social and human rights movements from abolitionism to the suffragettes, from union movement to feminism through LGBQT activism and Black Lives Matter, before concluding: '*we the people*, by which we mean not just a handful – not just property-owning white males – *all have a seat at the table'* (my emphasis).[127] Although Obama's 'inclusivity imperative' outlines the nature of the *political* task, it also predicates an examination of the lives and overlapping categories of disadvantage experienced by working people labouring beneath the broad parameters of the class, race and gender trilogy. As Ben Clarke and Nick Hubble indicate, this specifically necessitates '[c]hanging the ways in which the working classes are represented and understood […] [and requires] not only recognising the agency of working class people, their ability to speak about their own interests, but the diversity of experiences and identities potentially encompassed by the category 'working class' itself.[128] That the Birmingham group writers were responsive to the diversity of experience and categories of disadvantage to which working people were exposed *beyond*, though often running in parallel *with*, issues of class, race and gender, encourages the adoption of the intersectional approach I adopt in the following chapter.

Notes

[1] To the respectable working-class family the Means Test was an unprecedented intrusion into their privacy, as well as the symbol of a mean-spirited and vindictive State. 'The Means Test was tantamount to a new Poor Law in working-class demonology, and remains an abiding image of the period'. Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction: From Chartism to Trainspotting* (Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 1997), p. 37.
[2] Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream*, p. 142.
[3] Joseph Freeman and others, Introduction, *Proletarian Literature in the United States: An Anthology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, 1935), p. 6.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Beales, H. L. and R. S. Lambert, eds, *Memoirs of the Unemployed* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), p. 7.
[6] Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History,* p. 62.
[7] Ibid. Beveridge's involvement and the various committees on which he sat during the years 1940-41 issued in what later became known as the 'Beveridge Report'. This document essentially gave rise to the social reforms and legislation underpinning the Welfare State.
[8] Beales and Lambert, *Memoirs,* p. 7.
[9] Ibid, pp. 7, 25.
[10] Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1987), p. 18. Eagleton's, discussion at this point was geared to addressing the ideological element of Marxist criticism more than the working-class fiction's social function *per se*.
[11] Beales and Lambert, *Memoirs*, p. 9.
[12] M. Jahoda, P. F. Lazarfeld, and H. Zeisel, *Die Arbeitslosen von Marienthal* (Leipzig, 1933), and English edn., *Marienthal: The Sociography of an Unemployed Community* (London, 1972). Cited in Ross McKibbin, *The ideologies of Class,* p. 229.
[13] Ibid, p. 253. McKibbin suggests '*Marienthal* [was] a rather hit-or-miss description of a single-industry village of exceptionally high long-term unemployment from which only limited conclusions can be drawn.'
[14] Beales and Lambert, *Memoirs,* p. 91. Andy Croft refers to the occasionally archaic element in Brierley's language.
[15] Walter Brierley, 'Frustration and Bitterness: A Colliery Banksman' in Beales and Lambert, *Memoirs,* p. 93.
[16] *Turning Point*. A talk given by Brierley to the BBC 20th January 1965 detailing his life up to the publication of *Means Test Man* and his resumption of employment on his appointment as a Welfare Officer for Derby Education Authority. Brierley Papers DL282. Derby Local Studies Library. In the *Listener* article, beyond divulging his occupation as 'A Colliery Banksman,' Brierley remained otherwise anonymous, Mrs. Perowne had presumably written to *the Listener's* editors requesting the invitation be forwarded to the writer of the article.
[17] Ibid, p. 112.
[18] Walter Brierley, 'Frustration and Bitterness', in Beales and Lambert, *Memoirs*, p. 96.
[19] Christopher Hilliard believed Halward's epiphanic claim 'The sudden urge to express [himself] laid hold as unexpectedly as a fever,' was not 'wholly unreliable'. Although Hilliard was careful to add that the impulse to write 'is not to affirm the existence of some timeless creative urge wired into "human nature." There may be such an urge, but the notion of it is also part of the body of popular ideas about creativity and art that were current in early and mid-twentieth century Britain.' Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents*, pp. 113, 127.
[20] John Hampson, Letter to Brierley. 21st April 1934. DLS 282.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Derby Local Studies Library holds copies of some one hundred letters from Walter Allen and John Hampson offering Brierley advice and encouragement. Their correspondence with the Derbyshire writer reveals a deep friendship based upon mutual professional respect rather than beneficence or altruism.
[24] Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents*, p. 113.
[25] Chris Baldick, *The Modern Movement*, p. 184.
[26] John Fordham, *James Hanley Modernism*, p. 4.
[27] Richard Hoggart, *Speaking To Each Other* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 185 et seq.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ramon Lopez Ortega, 'The Language of the Working-Class Novel of the 1930s'. In H. Gustav Klaus *The Socialist Novel in Britain,* 122-144. p. 124.
[30] Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream,* p. 215.
[31] Ken Worpole was discussing the Liverpool writer James Hanley but his comments, as will be seen, are equally applicable to Brierley's procedure. Ken Worpole, Dockers and Detectives, p. 90.
[32] Carole Snee. 'Walter Brierley: A Test Case'. In *Red Letters,* p. 12.
[33] Simon Dentith, 'Tone of Voice in Industrial Writing of the 1930s'. Eds, Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight, *British Industrial Fictions,* 99-111. p. 99.
[34] Ibid, p. 100.

[35] Ibid, p. 104.
[36] Ibid, p. 100.
[37] Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse: A Study in Nineteenth Century British Working-Class Literature* (London: Croome Helm, 1974), p .38.
[38] Pickering. Michael and Kevin Robins, Eds, 'A Revolutionary Materialist with a Leg Free': The Autobiographical Novels of Jack Common'. In Jeremy Hawthorn, *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), 77-92. p. 79.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Herbert Marcuse, *Studies in Critical Philosophy* (London: NLB, 1972), p. 129.
[41] Michael Pickering and Kevin Robins cited in Simon Dentith Chapter 'Tone of Voice in Industrial Writing in the 1930s'. In Klaus and Knight, *British Industrial Fictions*, p. 105.
[42] Graham Holderness, 'Miners and the Novel'. In Jeremy Hawthorn, Ed, *The British Working-Class Novel*, p. 27.
[43] John Fordham, *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working-Class,* p. 4.
[44] Ibid, p. 26.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Though claiming 'Tramlines and slagheaps and pieces of machinery' as his 'ideal' scenery. 'Letter to Lord Byron' (1936), in an earlier poem 'Who stands, the crux left of the watershed' (1927), Auden appears to have been less ambivalent regarding industrial landscapes. Rather than attaching sentimental or romantic value, the observer should reflect on the daily struggle and ever present danger of injury or death for those who had worked in such hazardous occupations.
[47] Ryle. Martin and Kate Soper, *To Relish the Sublime,* p. 186.
[48] John Fordham, *James Hanley,* p. 4.
[49] Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1995), p. 142
[50] Ibid.
[51] Kristian Sotriffer, in Jack F. Stewart. 'Expressionism in the Rainbow', *Novel: A Journal on Fiction*, 13 (1980), 296-315. p. 297.
[52] Fredric Jameson, Ed, *Aesthetics and Politics,* pp. 36, 37.
[53] Andy Croft, *Red Letters*, p. 81.
[54] Andrew Harrison, 'The Regional Modernism of D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce', in Neal Alexander and James Moran, *Regional Modernisms* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 46.
[55] Walter Allen Letter to Brierley 11th September 1934. Brierley Papers. DL282. Derby Local Studies Library.
[56] Walter Allen Letter to Brierley 17th September 1934. Brierley Papers. DL282. Derby Local Studies Library.
[57] Walter Allen Letter to Brierley 11th November 1934. Brierley Papers. DL282. Derby Local Studies Library.
[58] Letters. Allen to Brierley. 11th Sept 1934 and 17th Nov 1934. Brierley Papers. DLS 282.
[59] Walter Allen, *As I walked Down*, p. 18.
[60] John Hampson Letter to Brierley 27th July 1934. Brierley Papers. DL282. Derby Local Studies Library.
[61] Although praising *Means Test Man* for its 'recreation of his own empirical observations of life on the dole', Carole Snee's charge that in *Sandwichman* Brierley merely used Lawrence as a lens with which to see the world and 'as a substitute for his own understanding',is, as I aim to show, unjustified. 'Working-Class Literature or Proletarian Writing', in Clark Jon, Margot Heinemann and others, *Culture and Crisis,* pp. 180, 181.
[62] John Fordham, Chapter 'Working Class Fiction across the Century', in Robert Caserio, *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 131-145. p. 136.
[63] Ibid, p. 132.
[64] According to Andy Croft, Oliver Baldwin the Labour MP and son of three times Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, demanded 'Every MP should read it!' [Means Test Man]. Though whether novels of this sort were influential on policy makers remains a moot point. The election of the Attlee government and the welfare changes brought about in the post-war consensus following the Second World War do suggest something of a delayed reaction following changes in the national attitude and a raised social conscience.
[65] Edward J. O' Brien, Introduction. p. viii. Leslie Halward, *To Tea on Sunday* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1936).
[66] Ibid.
[67] Steve Ellis, *British Writers and the Approach of World War II,* p. 174. ; Frank Kermode, *History and Value.* p. 34.
[68] John Fordham, Chapter: 'Working Class Fiction across the century' in Robert Caserio, *Cambridge Companion To The Twentieth Century English Novel,* p. 136.
[69] H. E. Bates, *The Modern Short-Story,* pp. 24, 25.
[70] Adrian Hunter, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 44.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ian Reid, *The Short Story* (London and New York: Methuen, 1977), pp. 62, 63.
[73] Dominic Head*, The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 1-36.

[74] Ibid, p. 194.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid, p. 26.
[77] Ibid, p. 27.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Louis Althusser. 'A letter on Art in reply to André Daspre', in *Lenin And Philosophy And Other Essays,* Louis Althusser (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 223.
[80] John Fordham, *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class,* p. 77.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story*, p. 28.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Graham Holderness, 'Miners and the Novel' in Jeremy Hawthorn, *The British Working-Class Novel,* pp. 26, 27.
[85] Carole Snee, 'Walter Brierley: A Test Case', *Red Letters*, p. 12.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Phil O'Brien. 'The De-Industrial Novel: Twenty First Century British Fiction', in Clarke, Ben and Nick Hubble' *Working-Class Writing*, 229-.246. p. 233.
[88] Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice,* p. 65.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid, p. 66.
[92] John Fordham, *James Hanley,* p. 79.
[93] Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past.' In *Moments of Being* (New York: Harcourt Brace Johanovich, 1985), cited in Louise DeSalvo, *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives* (Great Britain: Womens Press, 1999), p. 40.
[94] William Plomer, in Christopher Hawtree introduction to John Hampson, *Saturday Night at the Greyhound* (London: Hogarth Press, 1986), p. 4.
[95] Louise De Salvo, *Writing as a Way of Healing*, p. 41.
[96] John Fordham, 'Working-class fiction across the Century.' Robert Caserio, *Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel*, p. 132.
[97] Tony Davies, 'Unfinished Business: Realism and Working-Class Writing' in Jeremy Hawthorn, ed, *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century,* 125-136. p. 126.
[98] Steve Ellis, *British Writers,* p. 1.
[99] Walter Allen, *As I Walked Down*, p. 44.
[100] George Orwell, *Coming Up for Air* (London: Penguin Books, 1980), p. 168.
[101] Gyorgy Lukacs, Article in the New Hungarian Quarterly, vol xiii, No. 47. (Autumn 1972). Cited in Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism,* p. 30.
[102] Phil O'Brien, Chapter, 'The De-Industrial Novel: Twenty-First century British Fiction', in Clarke. Ben, and Nick Hubble, Eds, *Working-Class Writing,* 229-246. p. 229. ; Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution,* pp. 62-68.
[103] John Hampson, 'In the Underground II'. John Lehmann, Ed, *The Penguin New Writing*. 28.
(London: Penguin Books, 1947), p. 138.
[104] Walter Allen, 'Thirties Fiction A View From the Seventies', *Twentieth Century Literature'* 20. (1974), 245-251. p. 246.
[105] Postgate, Raymond and Margaret Storm Jameson, Eds, 'Writing in Revolt: Theory and Examples' *Fact*, No 4, p. 15.
[106] Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice*, p. 68.
[107] David Lodge, *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 47, 48.
[108] Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (Ithaca New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 164.
[109] Walter Allen, *As I Walked Down,* pp. 2, 3.
[110] Craft-pride, real and legitimate if exaggerated, was deeply divisive and more than one local labour party foundered on disputes between skilled and unskilled union members. Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class,* p. 37.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Paladin, 1991), p. 288.
[113] Arnold Hauser describes the bourgeois ethic of good workmanship which sees the criterion of aesthetic value in flawless technique and careful execution. *The Social History of Art: Naturalism, Impressionism, The Film Age*. *Volume IV,* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 105.
[114] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 49.
[115] William Butler Yeats, Stanza One line three, 'The Second Coming', From 'Michael Robartes and The Dancer', (1921). In W. B. Yeats, *The Poems,* Introduction and Edited by Daniel Albright, (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1992).
[116] Lara Feigel, *Literature, Cinema and Politics*, pp. 21, 22.
[117] Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism,* p. 46.

[118] Theodor Adorno, in Jameson, Ed, *Aesthetics and Politics,* p. 178.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Extracts from publicity reviews shown in Allen's second published novel *Blind Man's Ditch* taken from Wilfred Gibson *Manchester Guardian* and Edwin Muir *Listener,* (undated).
[122] George Lukacs, *The Historical Novel* (London: Merlin Press, 1962), p. 206.
[123] Andre Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism* (London: Pluto Press, 1980), p. 30
[124] Ibid, p. 31.
[125] Charles Dickens, *The Personal History of David Copperfield* (London: Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ltd, 1935), p. 9.
[126] Martin Kettle, 'The toxic polarisation of our politics can be reversed, but it will take humility', *The Guardian*, Thursday 26th November2020.
[127] 'David Olusuga talks to Barack Obama', BBC One, Wednesday 18th November 2020.
[128] Clarke, Ben and Nick Hubble, *Working-Class Writing*, p. 4.

Chapter Three

Writing Their Selves: Subjectivity and Representation in Birmingham Group Narrative

> Some of the most important work currently being done in literary theory and literary history centers [sic] on the discursive strategies by which marginalized subjects articulate selfhood and challenge dominant cultures. The study of proletarian fiction, which is replete with images and voices of the dispossessed seeking possession, makes an important contribution to this inquiry.[…] the political discourse in proletarian fiction centrally addresses the intersections of class with gender and race and thus bears directly on many key issues in contemporary cultural studies.[1]

It is to explore the 'voices of the dispossessed seeking possession' to which Barbara Foley alludes above that I now turn. Her assertion clearly predicates a deeper analysis of authorial subjectivity in the narratives of the Birmingham group writers deriving in turn from the social diversity of authors who, as I seek to capture in the title of this chapter, under the guise of pseudonymity, literally wrote themselves into their narratives. Moving from the thematic consideration of work and unemployment central to the critical discussion of working-class literature in the 1930s and, to escape the one hundred and fifty year old shadow of what Paul Mason defines as 'a predominantly white, male, manual labour force', this chapter will adopt an intersectional methodology.[2] Although class-based analyses of working-class literature continued throughout the 1930s, Karl Radek's repudiation of Proletkult methods and adoption of the popular-front oriented policies designed to promote allegiances in the fight against fascism led to a softening of Comintern's Third-Period 'class-against-class' policies and thus found the hitherto sectarian and patriarchal discussion placed temporarily in abeyance. These changes were mirrored in a critical climate which by attracting fellow travelling, middle-class writers, rather than by denouncing socialist realism outright, had served to imbue its erstwhile dry ideology with an appreciation of the aesthetic and, critical to my purposes here, to enable a more holistic literary discussion of contemporary working-class experience.

The position taken in this chapter dissents from the view that intersectionality is a 'retreat from class' and urges the retention of a class-based analysis, as the 'explanatory framework' with which to consider the manifold categories of disadvantage under which working-people's lives were subsumed.[3] Although my aim is to explore cultural categories neglected due to the traditional emphasis on class-struggle alone, I follow Victor Wallis who urges that, 'in terms of "real world" praxis, *class* has a strategic or binding function that does not pertain to any of the

other lines of oppression: it brings together, potentially into a coherent force, *all* the constituencies that are held down by the single most concentrated power in contemporary society, that of capital itself (original emphasis)'.[4]

The more recent discussion of its literature has encouraged a critical engagement with aspects of working-class experience beyond the narrowly patriarchal, and although she does not use the term 'intersectionality' directly, Nicola Wilson declares her aim is to place 'marital relationships, gender, household finances, education, and the kitchen table at the heart of what we understand about class', these areas constitute the categories which she considers 'central to understandings of self, place and society'.[5] She thus reiterates Peter Williams' assertion that 'work and workplace have dominated our conceptions of the ways social relations and institutions are constituted and reproduced. All else, it seems, has been regarded as secondary and as a reflection of the primary relations established through work'.[6] Wilson also references the work of historian Joanna Bourke who, drawing from working-class autobiographies, argued that the principal loci of class awareness and identity were 'not the factory floor nor trade union' but 'emerged from the routine activities of everyday life'[7]

An important aspect of Wilson's survey hinges on the distinction she makes between representations of 'observed' and 'inhabited' space and their implications for the formal elements in working-class writing. She illustrates this distinction by reference to the writing of Robert Tressell and D. H. Lawrence. Explaining why 'Tressell's detailed description of observed space, 'his often clear instruction to read off the home for character' (the rhetoric of domesticity) has generally fallen foul of critical favour', she contrasts his *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* with Lawrence's writing where 'the home is not 'read' in this way, but constitutes instead an existential, 'living, inhabited space', created through the actions and habitation of its characters.[8] Arguing that the experience of class is frequently 'understood…in only the narrowest of terms, [implying] misleadingly that working-class writing must be political or politicised' Wilson maintains that '[f]or many on the Left, analyses of society that spoke of the struggle in terms of anything but class (defined in terms of the politics of the male workplace), were regarded as divisive and disloyal to the cause'.[9] Yet, while there is currently a move towards adopting more appropriate perspectives from which to evaluate working-class narrative, the 'traditional', politically-biased agenda has proven tenacious and, as registered in H. Gustav Klaus' remarks in chapter one, persisted until quite recently.

Nick Hubble's *The Proletarian Answer to the Modernist Question* (2017) is similarly encouraging of the intersectional approach, positing thirties proletarian writing not merely as *peripheral*, but *central* to 'reconciling the individual with the collective', the task which, following

Alick West, he identifies as having exercised both modernist writer and Marxist critic alike during the early decades of the twentieth century (my emphasis).[10] Like Wilson, Hubble laments the preponderance of narrowly political readings, viewing women's political and intellectual history as a key factor in his exploration of working-class narrative. Observing how 'the revaluation of proletarian literature since the collapse of Eastern European Communism in 1989 […] relieved some of the ideological constraints that had inhibit[ed] unbiased criticism', he endorses an intersectional approach by asserting that issues of gender, sexuality and familial relations not only provide a more appropriate 'way in' to the analysis of working-class texts but that the perspectives they offer should be adopted more widely:

> In the quarter of a century [since] Hynes *The Auden Generation,* the proletarian literature of the thirties had not only become a major area of study but also had been demonstrated to exceed the workplace-set masculine concerns that had become associated with working-class writing in the post-war period by pre-figuring very contemporary feminist concerns.[11]

In the readings which follow, intersectionality will provide the theoretical apparatus with which to prise open the fictions of the Birmingham group for too long occluded by critical approaches founded on patriarchal concerns and class-based assumptions alone. By linking back to the earlier struggles of socially marginalised and disenfranchised characters described in their narratives, it is hoped this approach will illuminate areas and issues neglected in the contemporary discussion and foster a greater awareness *of* and imaginative solidarity *with* our fellow human beings, for in this respect the Birmingham writers' proximity to the working people they depict in their narratives strengthens their veracity, as Stephen Reynolds claims:

> [T]hose in the Slough of Despond themselves gain courage and endurance from the knowledge that someone else has been there too, has found it just as endurable and has come through. How helpful is that writer as a guide through the Slough, how calming and comforting his sympathy.[12]

That the Birmingham writers knew of both what and whom they wrote and frequently drew upon their own lived experience, predicates a closer look at the autobiographical strain which permeates their work. It is necessary here to distinguish the term *autobiography* from *autobiographical*, for the recent rediscovery of the hybrid genre 'autobiografiction' has problematised the distinction. This is taken up by Max Saunders in *Self-Impression* (2010), where Saunders explains the term as defined by Stephen Reynolds who coined it in his *'Speaker'* article of 1906.[13] According to Reynolds autobiografiction is a formal repository for 'anything that reacts

strongly on the mind' in the shape of 'spiritual experience': any emotion, beautiful thing, work of art, sorrow, religion, or love, which intensifies a man's existence; anything in short that directly touches his soul'.[14] According to Saunders, Reynolds distinguished 'autobiographical fiction' from his portmanteau term 'autobiografiction' by suggesting the latter lies at the intersection where autobiography, fiction and discursive writing meet and, rather than pitching it as a 'generic hybrid', advocated its use as an appropriate medium through which 'the complex individual might express himself'.[15]

Reynold's considered the qualities of intimacy and directness inherent in autobiografiction: its potential for recounting and recasting the spiritual experience of the introspective individual as that of another and providing an appropriate means by which to express and conceal one's identity as central factors in its utility. Saunders also mentions the cathartic element noting 'Reynold's closes his essay [by urging] that the chief significance of autobiografiction lies in the psychological consolation it offers.'[16] Saunders indicates Reynolds endorsement may have derived from the fact that 'as a homosexual, writing only a decade after the Wilde trial, he would have been particularly sensible of the need to be guarded about his intimate life.'[17] Nick Hubble cites Saunders work asserting that 'autobiografiction' provides a 'new critical paradigm' within which to read proletarian/modernist works because 'it exceeds autobiographical fiction by allowing writers to transform themselves performatively and represent a different understanding of selfhood'.[18] In his reading of Naomi Mitchinson's *We Have been Warned,* Hubble again references Saunders' *Self-Impression* to illustrate how 'autobiografiction' might function:

> Autobiografiction can include material that writers may prefer not to own in their own person; but rather than suggesting that their fiction gives them away, either consciously or unconsciously, they are claiming that the fictional permits a *fuller* autobiography. This is partly a matter of its being able to include the shameful as well as the honourable, and thus assemble a more complete, more human picture.[19]

The relevance of this will become more apparent in the analysis of the Birmingham group narratives below which, for want of a more comprehensive generic description than those provided by Barbara Foley, might each be better accommodated within the capacious bounds of 'autobiografiction'.

Fortunately, as has been registered throughout this thesis, as traditional critiques of working-class narrative have decreased, works formerly dismissed as politically quiescent are now

beginning to receive the kind of attention offered by more appropriate critical perspectives. However, this renewed focus upon works dealing in the everyday experience of the working-class is not to suggest it had been neglected in earlier accounts. For a long while Richard Hoggart's dewy-eyed recollection of his pre-war Yorkshire childhood in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) facilitated a collective, somewhat sentimentalised, remembrance of working-class *temps perdu,* as did George Orwell's nostalgic yearnings for the blissful content of the worker's fireside which, while possibly granting a 'better chance of happiness' than that afforded the 'educated man', was predicated on a 'breadwinner' who, in Orwell's formulation, was inevitably male, 'in steady work and drawing good wages'.[20]

Despite such misplaced reverie, the views of Orwell and Hoggart seem positively benign when set beside those of the Auden set, who would appear supportive of Cyril Connolly's pronouncement that 'there [was] no more sombre enemy of good art than the pram in the hall'.[21] Valentine Cunningham censures the 'bourgeois old boys' for their seeming reluctance to discuss gender, women, or children, and his observations provide further stimulus to the intersectional approach undertaken here.[22] Cunningham cites Virginia Woolf's address to the Conference of the Workers' Educational Association in 1940, where, referring to those [women] like herself who had not been through 'the male preserves of private and public schooling', she insisted, '[reading women] are not going to leave writing to be done for us by a small class of well-to-do young men – who have only a pinch, a thimbleful of experience to give us.'[23] The target of her animus had been the Auden set, and her address was (not without a degree of irony) later published as 'The Leaning Tower*',* in John Lehmann's *Folios of New Writing* II.[24] As Cunningham rightly saw, Woolf's metaphor of the thimbleful [suggested the 'Old Boys'] were unconscionably complicit in preserving the 'gendered binary' referred to above, he continues:

> If women came off badly in much '30s writing so, inevitably, did the presentation of the family. Family life flourishes, one notices, among the works of proletarian authors and in the so-called proletarian fictions. Not so among the texts of the bourgeois Old Boys. Which is why among the few heterosexual male authors in that class of writer there is a certain assertiveness about their marriedness.[25]

Woolf's contention that the male alumni of private and public schools showed such conspicuous unfamiliarity with women and the family, despite [having flourished] in the work of proletarian authors, lends further support to the focus of this chapter. If only to allow a little more air into the discussion of working-class prose literature, Woolf's sidelining of the Leaning Tower writers proves a welcome intervention.

As I hope this thesis has begun to show, while never less than political, the ideological commitment of Birmingham group writers is registered more *subtly*, yet paradoxically more *powerfully*, in a politics of form. John Fordham suggests the Liverpool writer James Hanley's refusal to utilise the characteristic monological structure of the conventional realist novel and his preference for modernist methods of treating social phenomena resonates with Adorno's proposal that 'art indicts by refraining from express indictment'. [26] In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno suggests 'Real denunciation is probably only a capacity of form which is overlooked by a social aesthetic that believes in themes. What is socially decisive in artworks is the content [*inhalt*] that becomes eloquent through the works formal structures'.[27] Though not as evident in Leslie Halward's 'English' version of naturalism, I would argue that Hanley's formal practice *is* echoed in the work of the other Birmingham group writers. Defined as a the politicisation of narratological and formal analysis, Greta Olsen and Sarah Copland urge that a 'politics of form' seeks to 'unite the formalist analysis of texts with readings that aim to uncover how structures of social power are expressed in and by, as well as challenged by aesthetic form.'[28] Given the symbiosis and simultaneity of formal method and the thematic content (thematic here defined as reflecting class-based issues and aspects of society) it can prove occasionally prove difficult to separate 'story' from 'discourse', and it will be seen that I have already made some reference to the aesthetics of form in the foregoing 'thematic' discussion.

The two novels I analyse in this chapter are Walter Brierley's *Sandwichman* (1937) and John Hampson's *Saturday Night At The Greyhound* (1931). Applying Barbara Foley's generic criteria, *Sandwichman* falls awkwardly between the categories of 'Proletarian Autobiography' and 'Proletarian Bildungsroman.[29] In conventional usage 'bildungsroman' identifies the 'classic' form of the bourgeois novel by tracing the fortunes of its protagonist as he/she overcomes the hurdles encountered on the path to 'maturation'. Brierley's *Sandwichman* differs in this respect as its protagonist – a thinly-veiled, pseudonymous representation of the author himself – seeks 'improvement' via the 'academic education' he feels denied owing to his lowly class position. Recording the obstacles placed before the working-class *litterateur* as he wrestles the conflicting demands of work and study, Brierley's novel, as we shall see, might better be described an 'anti-bildungsroman'. Using Foley's generic criteria John Hampson's *Saturday Night at the Greyhound* would qualify as a 'Proletarian Social Novel'. Exploring as it does the events and relationships befalling both staff and habitués of the eponymous Derbyshire public house from a range of character perspectives. As with Brierley's novel, Hampson's narrative is suffused with detail deriving from his personal experience of the situation and location he describes, and again though Foley's generic category functions provisionally, there seems a case for arguing that the

re-discovered branch of life-writing termed 'autobiografiction' proves more generically accommodating for both novels.

In addition to this analysis of the novels, I look at contrasting treatments of the short story in the works of Walter Brierley, Leslie Halward and Peter Chamberlain. Leslie Halward's 'A Broken Engagement' broadens the intersectional focus by providing a sensitive exploration of the woman's position under the prevailing social ethos, especially with regard to marriage, care and ageing. Peter Chamberlain's exercises and short-stories exploit the genres of 'found' sketch, comedy, satire, while employing snippets of overheard conversation and stream-of-consciousness techniques to depict working-class and suburban existence. Running these stories side-by-side enables a comparison of the short form produced by writers from differing sides of the class divide. Here, in terms of 'authenticity': the pre-requisite that a working-class writer be *from* the working-classes, Leslie Halward while identifying chauvinistically *with* the working-classes will, arguably, be found to be less 'class-conscious' than 'fellow travelling' Birmingham group companion Peter Chamberlain. The Walter Brierley short-story with which I commence, charts its protagonist's heartfelt intuition that 'there was something better in life than the pit'. Based upon its author's experience as a 'reluctant' collier, represented by the weary protagonist of 'Transition' mentioned earlier, in evidencing its author's resistance to prevailing notions of masculinity, 'Body' sets the tone for the ensuing discussion.[30]

Brierley repeatedly references the hardships of the collier's life, in his narratives. Rather than heroic, he likens pit work to '[the] bestial creature that devours men and women, by feeding on their labour and destroying their lives' which Graham Holderness discerns in Zola's *Germinal*.[31] In 'Body' these feelings are embodied in the character of Harry Rogers his young protagonist who – at only fifteen years of age, due to family circumstances and fresh from a most rudimentary, elementary education – has been thrust into colliery life.[32] The eldest of seven siblings and of a sensitive disposition, Harry is conflicted between a sense of familial duty: the requirement he contribute to the family coffers to supplement his father's meagre wage, and, built on a hazy intuition that life may have something better to offer, a fervent desire to escape an occupation he loathes. Unable to maintain the stoic resignation of the 'Big Jims', -Joes or -Jocks, the romanticised figures comprising what Valentine Cunningham identifies as the 'Bigness cult' in working-class fiction, Harry lacks both the physical stamina necessary to perform his labours and the mental stamina to withstand the baiting of co-workers who continually bully and intimidate him.[33] Brierley portrays him as defeated and incarcerated in an occupation to which he feels totally unsuited. Whereas other working-class novels treat of the young worker's often

troublesome 'initiation' as a rite of passage, something reluctantly endured but ultimately surmounted, Harry remains inconsolable.

During the inter-war period, as remarked in the reading of 'Belcher's Hod', male-dominated workplaces were (they often still are) beset by what R. W. Connell terms 'hegemonic masculinity' a persona requiring that men be 'active', 'aggressive', 'daring and tough' or, failing this, to suppress any evidence to the contrary.[34] Defined as a patriarchal outlook 'that legitimises men's dominant position in society and justifies the subordination of the common male population and women, and other marginalised ways of being a man' as shown in John Hampson's 'Man About The House', hegemonic masculinity provides a further illustration of how male-oriented conventions exert a destructive influence upon both individual and family life.[35] Shunned by his tougher contemporaries, Harry finds a more enlightened workplace ally in the shape of Shirley the chargeman, who (as with Brierley himself) is studying Latin, English and Logic and hopes to access University. Shirley's academic ambition kindles a similar interest in Harry who, due to family circumstances, had been unable to try for a scholarship and had been set to work the day after leaving school.

Following an incident in which Harry mistakenly releases a loaded coal tram potentially causing injury, he is severely reprimanded.[36] In what would have resulted in his sacking had Shirley not intervened, his despondency only deepens. His predicament akin to that of a fearful Great War infantryman, Harry contemplates self-mutilation by placing his hand between the heaving coal trams or putting his foot on the track so as to gain some respite in the form of certificated medical absence. However, he determines against this, rather than pursuing a contrivedly dishonest act, he feels sheer exhaustion might induce a physical collapse or faint and thus draw legitimate attention to his plight.

On his arrival home, Harry enters the wash house to cleanse himself and overhears his parents talking outside:

> "is our Harry workin' ta-morrer?"
>
> "No."
>
> "That's a bad job, it's not as if 'e got any dole."
>
> He splashed about the shallow bowl of water, then swilled double-hansful [sic] into his face. But for all that, the sob which was born suddenly within him rushed out and sounded above the splashing. (*B*, 517)

Harry's identity crisis: his sensitivity to his parents' hardships and his inchoate groping for a means of escape are anti-systemic. His physical inability and mental reluctance to function merely as a cog or unit in the means of production: a mere 'Body', combine in a sense of individual agency and present as a form of resistance. Though uncertain of who he is, he's sure of who he isn't, and in this respect 'Body' functions as a counter-narrative to works in which patriarchal notions of workplace behaviour and masculine solidarity are valorised. Though his protagonist is (at this juncture) unacquainted with the Marxist terminology of alienation, exploitation or commodification, Harry's inner-conflict assumes a universal significance, his irrepressible, primal sob the cry of the exploited worker echoing down the generations.

Brierley's Harry Rogers would have found a sympathetic counterpart in Harold Heslop's Joe Tarrant the protagonist in *Gate of a Strange Field,* a character whose 'sensitivity' and 'imagination' likewise mark him out from his co-workers. As Pamela Fox explains '[Joe's] eagerness at the age of fourteen to enter the colliery is first inspired, then dampened, by his free-ranging mind. The anticipated 'adventure' of work soon fades into the reality of 'slavery', the 'shackles of industry' imprisoning him'.[37] While Brierley's protagonist dreamed of pursuing the kind of education provided by the WEA (doubtless reflecting Brierley's own academic route), Heslop's Joe Tarrant opts for the 'Labor [sic] press' and later 'the "vortex" of institutionalised worker education', he found in the Plebs league, although as Fox indicates:

> Heslop's novel is much more openly conflicted about the authenticity of working-class epistemology taught from above. Its distrust of the Marxist education movement, the principal source of influence on (and often the source of) worker-intellectuals like [Frank] Owen and [Larry] Meath, calls into question the forms of [collective] agency privileged in [the novels of Tressell and Greenwood].[38]

As with Jonathan Rose's autodidacts, the overtures of Marxist theory gained little purchase in the imaginations of Brierley and Heslop or their protagonists.[39] Nonetheless, the male-oriented, masculine ethos of colliery life remained the backdrop against which characters such as Harry Stokes and Joe Tarrant, not to mention their creators, departed on their respective voyages of educational self-cultivation. Their paths to self-discovery are illustrative of the dilemma confronting both proletarian writers and their modernist counterparts as they wrestle the competing claims of individual and collective agency. That such 'claims' constituted a force to be reckoned with is evident in Alick West's aphoristic 'When I do not know any longer who are the 'we' to whom 'I' belong, I do not know any longer who 'I' am either'.[40] Succinct as West's formulation was, a more conciliatory formula may have lain in Ralph Fox's opinion that:

> [E]ach man has, as it were a dual history, since he is at the same time a type, a man with a social history, and an individual, a man with a personal history. The two of course, even though they may be in glaring conflict, are also one, a unity, in so far as the latter is eventually conditioned by the former, though this does not and should not imply that in art the social type must dominate the individual personality.[41]

The 'I/We' dilemma assumed significance in the pre-war climate where, as Valentine Cunningham suggests 'self-abandonment' became 'the only salvation for the shattered modernist self […] and represented the veriest orthodoxy of the Communist Party and *Left Review',* while simultaneously asserting, possibly sneering, in the direction of the Auden set, of whom he considered 'all were agreed on which side redemption lay in the contemporary war on pronouns'.[42] The socially-sublimating impulse described here runs counter to the approach I take in the remainder of this chapter where, by drawing upon notions of individual identity and consciousness, I explore how, rather than undermining collective agency, narrative representations of the individual 'I' fuse with the collective 'We' to provide a fuller, intersubjective, understanding of working-class experience.[43] Whilst aware that a culture cannot be boiled down to its essential properties, this reading will step outside what Eric Hobsbawm describes as the 'common style of proletarian life' - a characterisation constructed, as Nick Hubble observes, 'chiefly in relation to typically masculine activities and attributes,' - and will aim instead to establish how the Birmingham group narratives offer alternative, often illuminating, perspectives of working-class life occluded or lost to contemporary, politically-motivated engagements with their work.[44]

Despite the prestigious education received in the public school system, for many during the inter-war period, ill-education, lack of education, or, as we encountered it in 'Body', the rudimentary, pre-1944 Education Act, schooling meted out to working-class children remained – though an improvement on that outlined in Dickens' *Hard Times* – essentially utilitarian, leaving its recipients ill-equipped to cope with much beyond the most basic intellectual requirements. In terms of the intersectional analysis undertaken here, this served not only to disadvantage them economically but also spiritually and culturally. Pamela Fox references Helen Lynd's pertinent observation that 'Shame, while touched off by a specific, often outwardly trivial, occurrence initially felt as revealing one's inadequacies, may also confront one with unrecognised desires of one's own and the inadequacy of society in giving expression to these desires'.[45] Knowledge, more specifically the *pursuit* of knowledge (via higher education) as an oblique expression of a

worker's consciousness of lack or disadvantage, occurs as a leitmotif in working-class writing. Whether couched in terms of 'self-improvement' or, as connoted (usually negatively) by the term *embourgeoisification*, it is often treated ambiguously and considered a source of tension in working-class culture, where, as Richard Hoggart indicates:

> [T]here is often a mistrust of 'book-learning'. Are you any better off (i.e. happier) as a clerk or a teacher? What good does it do you? Parents who refuse, as a few still do, to allow their children to take up scholarships are not always thinking of the fact that they would have to be fed and clothed for much longer; at the back of this is the vaguely formulated but strong doubt of the value of education. That doubt acquires some of its force from the group-sense itself: for the group seeks to conserve, and may impede an inclination in any of its members to make a change, to leave the group, or be different.[46]

The outbreak of social conscience that impelled members of the privileged and well-educated elite to embark upon their cultural diaspora had not been one-way-traffic, the phenomena of cross-class mobility being echoed by members of the working-class who sought the cultural capital they believed might be theirs following academic study. As shown in the discussion of Walter Allen's novels, Birmingham narratives frequently chart the progress of characters seeking to acquire a level of cultural capital by means of educational advancement. In *Sandwichman* Walter Brierley traces the academic aspirations and misfortunes of his protagonist Arthur Gardner, literary counterpart to Hardy's tragic autodidact Jude Fawley and the hapless Leonard Bast, the object of Forster's satire in *Howards End,* who each share a 'relish for the sublime' and are determined to challenge the fixity of prevailing middle-class perspectives which characterise them as unworldly and idealistic. [47] As Pamela Fox indicated, at times the desire for cultural-capital morphs into an indictment *of* and resistance *to* the societal inequalities working-class people believe are pitted against them. E. M. Forster's Leonard Bast is cautionary in this respect, '[a]ttacked by one of the upper-class characters, he symbolically grabs a bookcase for support', unfortunately it falls crushing him and causes a fatal heart attack. 'Such are the dangers of higher education' John Carey suggests, especially 'when it is pursued by the wrong people'.[48] Yet, Rachel Howarth indicates that in 1902 Forster had begun teaching at the Working Men's College and continued to do so for twenty years thus demonstrating his interest in the cultural development of working-class people. Dissenting from Carey's viewpoint and seemingly in conversation with Pamela Fox, she argues that Leonard's demise functions as a comment on a society that leaves the working-class 'underfed in every way. It reflects social constraints, rather than indicting the innate abilities of a poverty-stricken working-class man'.[49]

The foregoing discussion of 'Body' is illustrative of the fact that not all male protagonists of working-class narrative would, or might wish to, conform to prevalent notions of masculinity, whether by emulating the forward-gazing, lantern-jawed, visionaries of socialist realism, the 'hard body' imagery of the American New Deal mural, or the kinds of masculine hegemony described earlier. However, the fact that as recently as 2016 the *New Statesman* would publish an article entitled 'How to be a man: The quiet crisis of masculinity', is testimony to the persistence of a gendered-binary and attitudes deriving from it.[50] Brierley's short-story is not only illustrative of the Helen Merrell Lynd's shame dynamic but is also pre-figurative of Alick West's "I"/"We" dichotomy in registering the plight of one unwilling to submerge his individuality or wholly abandon himself to the demands of collective convention. As Hubble observes 'Plenty of proletarian literature […] turns on a combination of shame and autobiografiction; for example, Brierley and Heslop (who both draw upon the example of Lawrence's autobiografiction), Gibbon (who draws on Lawrence and Joyce), Carnie Holdsworth and [Helen] Wilkinson all self-consciously, sometimes playfully – even to the point of self-parody – portray their selves as imaginary fictions dependent on an intersubjective relationship with other imaginary portraits drawn from their experience'.[51]

Following his completion of *Means Test Man* and an exchange of congratulatory correspondence from Walter Allen and John Hampson, Brierley received a further letter from Hampson encouraging him to '[s]tart another book as soon as [possible], your own history, in the form of a fiction should be excellent.'[52] Walter Allen considered likewise adding:

> I think John's suggestion is good. You should do an autobiographical novel now, keeping it as objective as possible. The usual itch to write other people's books! But I think I'd be tempted to restrict the book first of all to boyhood and youth in the pits. You could carry on then in another. That's probably bad advice, I don't know. All I know is that you can do a faithful book showing the rhythm of the workers lives without any marring propaganda or hysteria. Like Wilfred Owen's war poetry, where he says in his preface "The poetry is the Pity" – and the pity is unstated.[53]

As he made clear, Allen abjured facile, politicised polemic believing, with Marx and Engels, that ideas should spring naturally from the characters themselves rather than merely functioning as a mouthpiece for their author's views. The autobiographical novel that Hampson and Allen encouraged Brierley to write would follow in due course though not entirely as they envisaged. Far from conventional autobiography, Brierley's novel would instead offer an unremittingly bleak

and subjective account of the difficulties encountered by a member of the working-class who embarked upon the path of educational self-cultivation.

As Ian Haywood points out, while retaining a focus on the 'emasculated male worker', *Sandwichman* develops 'the critique of patriarchal attitudes' begun in *Means Test Man*. However, whereas the injustices heaped upon the family in the earlier novel derived from external factors, the tragedy depicted in *Sandwichman* is the product of its protagonist's/author's own ambition.[54] Generically speaking, *Sandwichman* departs from the anglicised notion of a *Bildungsroman*, which might be defined as an account of the author/protagonist's progress to maturity and insight, a definition hardly compatible with the tragic conclusion of Brierley's novel. In this respect *Sandwichman* is closer to Stephen Reynold's conception of *autobiografiction,* as a mode able to 'encode the lives of authors and contacts, often in roman-a-clef', whilst also proving 'the most productive site for the representation of consciousness, gender identity, education and the inner life'.[55] Deriving from his own experience of pit life and his failure to win a scholarship to study full time at Nottingham University, Brierley began to consider how the pursuit of educational self-realisation and its implications for inter-personal relationships and class-solidarity might be shaped into novel form. Rather than producing the 'formal' or conventional autobiography his Birmingham companions had suggested, Brierley would shape his experiences into a hybrid genre closer, though he is unlikely to have been familiar with the term, to Stephen Reynold's definition of 'autobiografiction'.

In addition to working at the local pit, Arthur Gardner is studying part-time at Trentingham University College (a barely-disguised Nottingham University) and is currently courting girlfriend Nancy Maugham. Arthur is twenty-three years old, the only child of his father, killed at the outset of the Great War. Following her husband's death, Arthur's mother remarries Albert Shirley. He, along with sons Albert and Sidney from his previous marriage (we are not told the fate of the former Mrs. Shirley), become Arthur's step-father and step-brothers. Albert Shirley is presented as having fallen upon hard times: 'Until his early twenties he had held a good position in a large co-operative society, but, owing to some misdemeanour had been compelled to seek a livelihood at an occupation where an exemplary moral character was no essential'. (*SM*, 6) Ian Haywood suggests the step father's 'vindictive behaviour' and his attempts to frustrate Arthur's plans stem from an envy borne of his own 'downward mobility'.[56] Arthur's mother typifies the respectable working-class woman that adverse circumstance has reduced to genteel poverty and, in this respect she may be likened to D. H. Lawrence's Gertrude Morel. Brierley's narrator informs us that 'All three [boys] were intelligent, their mother's endowment, yet the two

Shirleys lacked drive each and the capacity to reach forward, aware of the moment only, though filling each richly but without point'. (*SM*, 6) Arthur's mother nonetheless sought to inculcate a level of artistic sensibility amongst the boys, and though perhaps inevitable she dotes on her biological son, her stepsons are not without a degree of accomplishment. Albert listens to radio symphony concerts and is knowledgeable in the classics, whilst Sidney is shown as competent in reading the 'plainer-mannered authors of France'. (*SM*, 6)

From the novel's outset, Arthur's single-minded devotion to his studies is shown to precipitate family conflict; difficulties in his relationship with girlfriend Nancy and tensions at his place of work. Having arrived home one evening prior to his stepfather and stepbrothers, Arthur seats himself for the evening meal and quietly apprises his mother of his academic progress. As with Lawrence's Gertrude Morel, she offers encouragement but is concerned Arthur's energy will be quickly consumed, spread so thinly as it is between work, girlfriend and study, especially with examinations imminent. Arthur responds with bluff confidence 'Don't you worry, mum,' […] 'In October Is'll say good-by to the black hole and be a black-gowned undergrad'. (*SM*, 4) Unconvinced by her son's self-assurance she retorts 'Don't you harp on that. You never know what might happen'. (*SM*, 4) Though clearly proud of her son's fortitude, this tender mother-son colloquy is abruptly terminated by the sound of 'slurring nailed boots on the yard'. (*SM*, 4) The jarring noise closes down any further discussion by signalling the return of her husband and two stepsons from the pit whereupon the mood quickly changes, as Arthur retires to the front room to commence his evening's studies:

> She watched him go, her eyes were warm, the spirit in her face reached out as if to fuse with his in some kind of victorious peace. But she cleaned her face of all expression when her husband and other two sons clattered into the kitchen and clinked their tin drums on to the back of the sink, then threw their coats, caps and scarves on to Arthur's by the fireplace. That expression never shone from her eyes except on the occasions when she was alone with her eldest son. It was not that she loved him more than the others. (*SM*, 5)

This extract provides a useful 'way in' to Brierley's narrative, and although we analysed the use of irony and some of the broader aspects of Brierley's style in the discussion of *Means Test Man,* it is worth commenting a little on the devices he employs here which, despite their economy of means, communicate a wealth of information in respect of characterisation and the wider aspects of familial behaviour with which Brierley engages. Arthur's retreat to the front room to commence his studies represents his separation from the existential flux of family life. Watching him go Arthur's mother feels it necessary to suppress her pride and contain any expression of

shared joy in her eldest son lest it be construed as favouritism by his step brothers. As illustrated in this passage, the grind of hobnailed boots is something of a trope in mining novels, their sound often measuring the comings and goings of the proletarian day. Announcing the Shirleys' homecoming the alliterated 'k' sounds momentarily expunge the last remnants of quiet confidentiality between Arthur and his mother, the clattering intrusion of external reality registered by the change in her facial expression.

The miners' boots function as a metonym, their slurring sound signifying not only the coarseness and ugliness of the occupation from which Arthur hopes to escape, but also seeming to mock him in the attempt. Likewise where the coats, caps and scarves thrown on top of Arthur's clothes, enact a metaphorical smothering symbolic of a collective resistance toward those having the temerity to defy cultural convention. Richard Hoggart remarks that individuals seeking to 'take up some educational activity – so as to 'work for their class' or 'improve themselves' – tend to be ambiguously regarded' by the working-class community and though Arthur's stepbrothers are not without their own cultural enthusiasms, these are pursued in the more socially acceptable form of hobbies or interests, rather than potentially 'class-alienating' activities.[57] Arthur's stepfather articulates the suspicion directed at 'self-improvers' when he opines that Arthur '[t]hinks because 'e knows a bit o' blasted 'istory an' 'alf a dozen French words that 'e's too good for t'pit'. (*SM*, 101) Arthur's plans to better himself undeniably generate conflict within the domestic sphere. His mother's encouragement and dreams for his success also register an implicit 'rejection of [the] life that [her husband] has had to accept as all that's on offer' and necessitate she adopt an attitude of circumspection and diplomacy.[58] Again Hoggart was unequivocal in his conviction that 'once established as the mother of the family, the working-class wife comes into her own' […] 'She is then the pivot of the home, as it is practically the whole of her world. She, more than the father, holds it together'.[59] This was certainly the portion allotted Gertrude Morel in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, and, having read examples of the quick close relationships, the cut and thrust of working-class life described by his spiritual mentor, this was undoubtedly a pattern of working-class experience Brierley sought to emulate. According to Philip Gorski, John Hampson and Walter Allen had advised Brierley against making Arthur illegitimate. He doesn't explain why, though one imagines the stepfather/stepson relationship would offer more potential for familial conflict and existential crisis within such a charged domestic environment.

What is already a tense situation quickly comes to a head. Despite his mother's caution, Arthur has spread himself too thinly between work, his girlfriend and his studies, fatigue leads to an argument at work, which results in an accident and damage that sets the pit's work schedule

back two days, as a consequence of which he is dismissed.[60] The implications in terms of domestic economics and what his mother anticipates will be her husband's angry response are devastating. Again, Brierley communicates the mother's anguish by reference to her physical response alone, 'Her mouth was loose, her eyes dull, the hope she had carried because of him faded, her whole physical being drooped'. (*SM*, 99). Following her husband's return from work an unholy row ensues. Affronted by his stepfather's hectoring tone, Arthur demands to know 'who the hell he thinks [he is]?' to which his antagonist storms:

> 'An' who the hell are you?' The man rose from his chair but Arthur did not flinch.
> 'You'll find your clothes and books chucked out on to t'yard if you don't 'ave less of your damned buck.' His arm came up but lowered again as he saw the young man's mouth line.' 'Bloody young mon-funk.' […] '[Arthur] turned away in disgust, saw his mother leaning heavily on the table, her face grey even too her lips, a glazed empty look was in her eyes which blinked as if the lids were hardly capable of function'. (*SM*, 101)

Following a walk to cool down, Arthur returns to the house. 'His mother was seated on the sofa, her hands resting on her lap. She looked like a sick animal' (*SM*, 101). Once again the mother's thoughts are communicated by her physical appearance alone: her acquiescent, defeated posture more closely resembling a state of repose. Having confided to Arthur that the familial tensions are pulling her apart, she appears emotionally drained and pleads with Arthur to avoid further confrontation advising 'say nothing back to him.' […] 'He's the master here, and he'll show it.' […] 'He's been on since you went out. He'll be on, now, for a week or more, especially if he gets in the pub every night'. (*SM*, 102) Here an intersectional reading proves helpful as it brings into focus gendered relationships overlooked or treated as peripheral to more overtly political discussions of working-class literature. Whilst not advocating Brierley as a proto-feminist, the above extracts reveal him as a conscious and sympathetic observer of the women's position in contemporary society. Doubly disenfranchised by patriarchal and class oppression founded on notions of the living-wage and male breadwinner models, such ideological constructions fostered a gender ideology in which 'femininity served as the counterpoint to an aggressive masculinity' and which, as revealed here, whether actual, threatened or proximal, ultimately became for many working-class women a 'hierarchical relationship enforced through violence'.[61]

Brierley's depiction of Arthur's relationship with Nancy again reveals an empathy for the woman's experience, here, just as they proved for Hoggart's 'scholarship boy', Arthur's studies demand he is 'more and more alone'.[62] His single-minded devotion not only creating distance between family and workmates but also between himself and Nancy. Ian Haywood suggests her

predilection for dances, pictures and nice clothes represents the battle-line Arthur draws between the philistinism of mass culture (what Haywood refers to as Orwell's palliatives) and the barely attainable salvation of higher culture – which, as noted in the discussion of Walter Allen's *Blind Man's Ditch,* was also one of the 'battle lines' Eugene Lorimer drew in his quest for cultural capital.[63] Again intersectionality provides a useful framework for this discussion because here, rather than dismissing Nancy as merely shallow and superficial, it might be fairer to view her as a victim of the 'capitalist institutionalising of social relations'; the 'absorption of the dominant ideology' that Carole Snee identifies in her discussion of Jane Cook in *Means Test Man*.[64] Nancy's 'learned behaviour' is the female counterpart to the 'male breadwinner model' which, as Nicola Wilson indicates 'was a key part of Trade Union policy from the mid-nineteenth century to the inter-war period, and has been seen by historians as a gendered and spatial ideology which underpinned the historical development of the British working-classes'.[65] More sinned against than sinning, Nancy's desire for the kinds of material fulfilment promoted by idealised notions of the companionate marriage and the projections of popular cinema ought not to be dismissed out of hand. Pamela Fox uses the term 'benevolent spectators' to describe the tendency to condescension shown towards working-class women not only by male literary critics but also by feminist scholars critical of female material desire. Noting 'the desire for some degree of *gender*-marked difference' in the writing of working-class women (original emphasis), Fox maintains that as readers of this literature, 'we are still troubled by that "narrow plot," threatened by its implications. […] 'The "desire" which it names enacts a refusal of the boundaries circumscribing working-class existence and cultural production.' [66] In short, desire may also function to resist societal values, or rather the values of respectability projected downwards by bourgeois society. Traditional attitudes run deep and Nancy's behaviour is not entirely blameworthy for there is clearly an element of parental collusion, as Arthur reflects:

> She could think of nothing but the pictures on Saturday evenings at one time. Now he couldn't get her near, except about once a month. They must go and lie in the fields, or prop themselves up against stiles and fences. And last Saturday she had asked him to tea, and her father and mother had gone out at six o'clock. It would have to stop. (*SM*, 49)

Here the parallels with the similar episode in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* are clear. Arabella employed a similar strategy, telling her mother 'He's shy: and I can't get 'un to come when you are here. I shall let him slip through my fingers if I don't mind, much as I care for 'n!'.[67] Both novels trace the fortunes of their protagonists' educational aspirations while simultaneously registering the distractions of their loved ones.[68]

Compared with the criticism of political quietism and passivity levelled at *Means Test Man*, the critical reception of *Sandwichman* was relatively subdued. Changes in Comintern policy – from the third period 'class-against-class' to the exigencies of a 'popular front' had created a critical environment less hostile to works previously perceived as lacking a political agenda and now sought to enlist intellectuals and writers hitherto considered reactionary into the CPGB to assist in humanity's fight against fascism. On a critical level this was reflected in something of a *volte face.* Andy Croft records how Harold Heslop's *Gate of a Strange Field* fell foul of 'third period' prescriptivism. Heslop's Lawrencian treatment of colliery life had met with the censure of the ILPs *New Leader* reviewer and similarly his later *Last Cage Down* for its 'over-sexed' treatment'. As Croft maintains, 'as long as the Left endorsed a mixture of sectarianism, puritanism, anti-intellectualism, and anti-Utopianism, it could not respond to the one intellectual and literary influence that the miner novelists looked to'.[69] Croft records that having made a 'penitent and committed attempt […] to answer his critics' in *Last Cage Down* (1935), a cruel irony awaited Heslop, for by the time his novel was published the third period had passed. His writing, now under the aegis of modified popular front directives, was now considered 'too wholesale in its criticisms of trade union officials' and 'a little too sectarian for these days'.[70] Brierley was luckier, though written against the changing backcloth of Comintern policy, the reception of his second novel was more positive. Reviewing *Sandwichman* in the *Daily Worker,* B. L. Coombes described it as 'a worthy successor to *Means Test Man*' and, as Croft indicates 'praised it for precisely those qualities the paper had found lacking in that novel two years earlier' remarking that 'Mr. Brierley has not attempted to over dramatise his story. He has told it naturally and quietly'.[71] Despite such critical adjustments, there remained pockets of resistance in certain quarters. Philip Gorski believes the novel's 'subject matter and 'apolitical' approach made it unpopular with respectively: the guardians of the Great Tradition on one hand and a mechanical Marxism on the other'.[72] The latter evident in the remarks of Carol Snee, and although she praised *Means Test Man* effusively for its depiction of how social inertia distorted domestic relationships and gender-related issues, she judged that in *Sandwichman* Brierley had neglected 'the Litmus paper of his own experience.'[73] This seems hardly fair, as an individual who spent some four years pursuing his dream of a higher education, Brierley tapped deeply into his emotions to recount with honesty what must have been a painful experience. That Snee gives Brierley's account short shrift is not entirely surprising for she believes education, particularly the kind of WEA course undertaken by Brierley, to be a betrayal of class values as it precipitates movement away from one's class roots: '[Brierley's] education never becomes a way of understanding himself, his world, or his class, rather it

becomes a process of alienation.'[74] The text of *Sandwichman* does not endorse this view however, for as Brierley's narrator tells us:

> He was no snob; he seemed to realise even as he thought, and was content to know, that, however far he reached from the practical atmosphere of his class, he would still be one of them, no better than the miner conscious of life. He didn't want to be either. Examples of climbing under managers and deputies shot to his mind and shuddered him. (*SM*, 49)

The German tradition of *Bildung,* while initially aimed at individual self-cultivation was not conceived as the appropriation of cultural capital for its own sake, but as a process whereby the knowledge gained would be geared to the critical engagement and development of one's society.[75] In this respect, Arthur's desire to teach: to restore something to his community and class, was, rather than self-orientated or economically instrumental, more honourable than Snee allows. By dismissing Arthur's educational aspiration as 'self-interest', Snee illustrates the Marxist position in the 'I'/'We' debate by articulating the difficulty of reconciling individual self-realisation with group consciousness. Given her preference for 'proletarian writing that exhibits a greater awareness of class as its primary determinant' rather than what she considered the artistic pretensions of a working-class '*literature',* Snee's personal allegiance is clear, and though not in conformity with the views expressed here, is nonetheless consistent.[76]

As we have seen D. H. Lawrence was a powerful influence upon working-class writers, yet it is mistaken to claim, as does Snee, that Brierley merely worked in his shadow. MacDonald Daly reminds us how their respective life experiences were markedly different.[77] Just as Lawrence's Paul Morel sought to avoid his incarceration as a 'prisoner of industrialism', so with Lawrence himself who baulked at the prospect of being constrained within the 'relations of production'.[78] By contrast, Brierley was thoroughly enmeshed *within* the relations of production, paradoxically moreso during the periods of unemployment when he became the 'vulnerable victim of exclusion *from* them (my emphasis)'. In his varied roles as miner, member of the unemployed and parent, Brierley's life within the mining community provided him with experience and insights undiscovered and unavailable to Lawrence.[79]

While this discussion has made reference to Richard Hoggart's scholarship boy in *The Uses of Literacy*, Ian Haywood reminds us that Brierley's novel preceded Hoggart's account by some twenty years.[80] Philip Gorski presses further explaining that 'whereas Hoggart *describes* the attempted transition, Brierley *dramatises* it in novel form thus achieving greater power and complexity' (original emphasis).[81] It appeared that in his determination to discover there was something more to life than the pit and in detailing the difficulties facing the individual bent

upon securing a 'non-alienated destiny', Brierley was attempting to work through his own personal demons and 'to discover', in Jonathan Rose's words, 'how his individual life fitted into the larger society.'[82]

Notions of subjectivity and representation are foregrounded as Brierley engineers a 'set-piece' in which Arthur attempts to explain his position in the 'I'/'We' debate. Following a dispute in which his friend David Neil has been angered by a fellow student's defamatory remarks concerning Trade Union leaders, Arthur attempts to placate his friend by articulating his own perplexity: 'I know why you're angry Dave but I couldn't be angry at a remark like that– I couldn't really. I can't grasp the idea of class somehow. I never know a man as a miner or a coal-owner; they're just individuals to me, pushing forward through life'. (*SM*, 61) Arthur continues: 'I'm glad I'm not like either of you with your emphasised feels [sic] of indifference on one hand, and contact on the other. What he won't recognise is that there are others beside himself; you that there are others beyond your particular clique'. (*SM*, 62) As Brierley shows elsewhere in his novel, Arthur is perplexed by the difficulty of reconciling his individuality and urge to self-realisation with that of group or collective interests; as Ian Haywood suggests, 'Arthur's understanding of the links between education and emancipation are still forming', a process that may have been equally applicable to Brierley himself at this point..[83] As Philip Gorski claims, rather than attempting to reconcile the 'worlds of work and culture [that had] long been too polarised', Brierley's achievement lay in revealing the workings of this polarity and its effects through the action of his novel'.[84] In its 'autobiografictional' conflation of Walter Brierley and Arthur Gardner, *Sandwichman,* though offering little by way of solution, provides a sympathetic representation of the difficulties encountered in the troubling attempt to reconcile individual consciousness with communal solidarity.

In chapter one, I referenced the work of practitioners and critics of the short story who had become impatient with invidious comparisons between their chosen form and the novel, and who believed the short-story may be better considered a discrete literary genre in its own right. Suited to a single event or episode, the Birmingham group writers each employed it as a worthy means by which to communicate their scenes of working-class life. In the following section, I devote some time to analysing contrasting treatments of the short form in the hands of Leslie Halward and Peter Chamberlain. Given the foregoing discussion of *Sandwichman,* one would be hard pressed to characterise Walter Brierley as a member of the bourgeois elite, yet this was exactly the position taken by Birmingham's Leslie Halward who expressed the view that 'The worst thing that could happen to a young working-class man [sic] with a desire to write about his

people […] is that he be sent to a College or a University. Once such a young man gets 'education' into his system, becomes a student and has a taste of culture, all is lost'.[85] Halward's *ressentiment* was evident in his contribution to the *London Mercury* symposium 'The Coming of Proletarian Literature'.[86] For, despite his vitriol towards class 'outsiders', Halward's ire was not reserved for them alone. Rejecting the dubious advantage to be gained from academic studies, Halward considered Walter Brierley's and Frederick C. Boden's attendance on the Nottingham University extension course akin to treachery.

However, as with Walter Brierley and John Hampson, Halward's no-nonsense depictions of working-class experience recovered the voices of those lost to traditional sectarian readings. As we saw in 'Belcher's Hod', Halward was percipient and probed diligently beneath the tough exterior of his characters to discover their inner vulnerability. This was no less true in his sensitive portrayal of his female protagonists. Owing to the requirement that women 'man' the factories of Birmingham and other provincial cities during the Great War, Victorian axioms such as 'a woman's place is in the home' had become increasingly untenable. Nevertheless, a significant number of working-class women still remained in, or returned to, varieties of unpaid labour in the shape of child-rearing, caring, cleaning, cooking, domestic conflict arbitration and the myriad responsibilities with which they dutifully but often reluctantly engaged in the family home. As we have seen, the overlapping social categorisations highlighted in an intersectional reading reveal that many women were indeed doubly, often triply oppressed, economic circumstances dictating their lives proceeded unremarked, unrewarded and not uncommonly subject to violence. The following discussion of Halward's short-story 'The Broken Engagement' finds its author's class loyalties extending to solidarity with his contemporary female counterparts and engaging in the 'critique of patriarchal attitudes' Ian Haywood discerned in the writing of Walter Brierley.[87] As Paul Lester observes, 'Halward's feel for working-class culture include[d] a sympathetic understanding of the burden's imposed by women's traditional domestic role.'[88]

While ostensibly examining the breakdown of a working-class relationship, 'A Broken Engagement' delves further by providing a moving account of the self-sacrifice undertaken by its female protagonist in order to care for her sick and aging mother. Here Halward makes effective use of the short form by revealing a seemingly inconsequential quotidian event as an instance of the heroic ordinariness of everyday life and giving voice to those often neglected in contemporary accounts. At the story's outset, Halward introduces us to his protagonists, Vincent Broome and Annie Grove:

> He had a pale, podgy face, a squat nose with gaping nostrils and a loose mouth, the lips thick, the lower one slightly protruding. His broad, flat skull was bald at the front, and at the back his oily black hair stuck out behind his ears and over his jacket collar like tufts of blackened grass. His mild, expressionless brown eyes gazed inquiringly through the powerful lenses of his steel-rimmed spectacles.
>
> She was a year older than he. Her name was Annie Grove. She was so thin that she looked ill-nourished. Her body was as straight, as flat, and hard-looking as a board. There was a deep hollow between two cord-like sinews at the base of her meagre neck. Her nose was long, thin, and pointed, as if it had been nipped sharply between thumb and finger, and the end of it, against the dead white of her face, showed red. Her mouth was so small, the lips so tightly compressed, that it might have been sewn up with invisible thread. She had grey eyes, large and round as fish's eyes, and a great mass of mousy hair that was piled up on top of her head like a helmet. (*BE*, 77)

This rather unforgiving portrayal certainly illustrates the 'caustic point of view' Cyril Connolly discerned in Halward's writing, his unprepossessing characters presented almost as Dickensian grotesques, both aging, he oily and unkempt, she emaciated and ill-nourished.[89] Having been engaged for several years their love has soured; to this extent their ordinariness and sullen acceptance mark them less as Dickensian, more the classic Chekhovian subjects. Though at times bordering on the cruel, Halward's descriptive 'disinterestedness' derives from knowledge gained under Chekov's tutelage: 'If you want to touch your reader's heart you must be cold.'[90] That he was unflinching in his adherence to Chekhov's advice was apparent to Walter Allen who considered:

> Halward made himself the most objective of writers, and the most economical; his prose is admirably direct and terse; no opinions are expressed. […] He was dealing with characters who were deprived and largely dispossessed, and they do not necessarily arouse his sympathy; they interest him.[91]

In terms of the observed/inhabited space distinction mentioned earlier, Halward was not averse to providing descriptive detail as in the following extract where the dank chill of the front room and its furnishings provide an appropriate backcloth to the couple's mood and physical appearance:

> They sat on the old-fashioned horsehair sofa in the front room of the house where she lived with her mother. The room was small and overcrowded with ancient furniture. Heavy plush curtains,

> like blankets, covered the window, and another hung over the door to keep out the draught. The room was lit by one of two gas-jets fixed on either side of the chimney breast, there was a gas fire at their feet, but this was turned so low that the little warmth it gave out did not reach them. In spite of its stuffy appearance the room was chill and smelt damp. (*BE,* 78)

Expressing a preference for 'showing' rather than 'telling', the following passage finds Halward once more heeding his mentor's advice:

> Vincent and Annie had sat in silence for a long time, the man leaning forward with his forearms on his thighs, his head bowed, his fat, moist hands at one moment clasped together and at another awkwardly dangling between his knees; the woman upright, her hands lying loosely in her lap, her head high, as she gazed at the photograph of a lady in a dress with leg of mutton sleeves that stood in the middle of the mantle shelf. (*BE*, 78)

Presented in the form of a tableau, the couple's self-conscious body language and the reference to the photograph combine with the earlier description to create an airless, stale atmosphere commensurate with their deteriorating affections. Though no word is spoken, such visual descriptions heighten the reader's sense of apprehension. 'At last the woman spoke':

> "I've been thinking over things, Vincent," she said, still looking at the photograph, as if speaking to it instead of to the man at her side. "I think we should both be better off if we were free." … "I don't want you to take this too hardly or to think too badly of me," she went on, hurriedly, as if afraid of forgetting some part of what she wanted to say. "I've not made my mind up on an impulse, as a young girl might. I'm not a young girl, Vincent. I'm old enough to know what I really feel, to be certain of myself when I decide anything. I've thought about this for a long time Vincent. I'm sure it would be better if we were to part. I'm sure we should both be a great deal happier." (*BE,* 79)

Annie doth protest too much. Though couching her words in terms of their respective release and liberation from the conventions of contemporary courtship, the repeated 'I's in the above extract are undermined by the protracted glance towards the photograph of the (old lady) her mother and, likewise the haste in her utterances lest she forget some part of what was clearly well-rehearsed speech. These combined conspire to persuade the reader her decision to break the engagement was occasioned by extrinsic circumstance rather than personal desire. As we learn at the end of the story, Annie had been conflicted between pursuing her relationship with Vincent and (pre-welfare-state) working-class conventions that determined the duty of care generally fell to the 'family', namely a woman.

Having 'walked out together' for some seven years, the romantic first flush of courtship has long since vanished, Annie and Vincent's engagement has been extended due to economic circumstances, and though dutifully and honourably following the conventions of contemporary betrothal, their relationship has become jaded and mechanical, a grim persistence at best.[92] Yet, for his part Vincent seems initially rather shocked at Annie's suggestion. A residual desire to continue their engagement persists: 'There's my course,' he reminds her, his voice curiously high-pitched in tone. 'I'm studying hard. In a year I may be a salesman. If you could wait another year—'. (*BE,* 79) Some brief exchanges follow before Annie rises from the sofa 'Here's your ring, Vincent,' she said. And pulled it off her finger and gave it to him. Vincent's response brings to mind H. G. Wells' Kipps:

> Not until that moment had he realized the full significance of what had occurred. Now it filled his mind like a flood of blinding light in a darkened room. He was free! He was no longer tied to this woman. She could no longer hinder him, no longer hold him back. His mind leapt to the future. He would leave Dobsons and go to another town. He would work hard at his course. In a year or two he would be a salesman. Then, without this millstone round his neck, he would climb – move upwards, always upwards, until finally he reached the top. Alone he would rise to the very pinnacle of success. (*BE*, 80, 81)

It takes Vincent some moments to register the fuller implications of his release, but Halward's use of free-indirect narrative combined with the third-person pronoun 'she' and the demonstrative 'this woman' clearly register the emotional space that has opened up between the couple. The verbs 'tied', 'hinder', 'hold back' each indicative of Vincent's erstwhile constraint, released from the obligations of this desultory relationship, he is free to pursue his destiny. Vincent's imaginary contrasts poignantly with Annie's reality. After he leaves, she returns to the living room to find her mother sitting in a straight-backed chair near the table. 'In the gas light she looked incredibly old. Her face was yellow and deeply wrinkled, like cracked parchment'.

> Presently the old woman looked up. Her eyes were two tiny black points.
> 'Have you told him?' she asked.
> 'Yes', replied the daughter
> 'What did he say?'
> 'Nothing.'
> There was a further long silence.
> Then, the old woman said, 'I'll have my milk now, Annie'. (*BE*, 82)

Having settled her mother to sleep, Annie retires herself. '[She] did not try to sleep. She did not even close her eyes. She lay awake thinking of what life had in store for her'. (*BE*, 83)

> She knew now that she would never see Vincent again. She knew that she would never marry. She told herself that she would find happiness in another, and perhaps a better, way. She thought of her mother's words. 'I don't know what I should do without you,' and felt a deep glow of pride. Her mother needed her. 'As long as she lives,' she thought, 'I'll never leave her. I shall be doing my duty. And I shall be content.' But even as she thought this she turned her face to the pillow and began to sob as if her heart would break. (*BE*, 83)

In this poignant closing scene Halward reveals the full implications of Annie's situation. Prior to Beveridge's eradication of the five "Giant Evils", working-class people were generally unable to access private nursing facilities; it fell upon wives and daughters to care for sick or elderly relatives. Forfeiting her own desires and interests, Annie determines on self-abnegation. In drawing together the interconnections between categories of disadvantage such as gender, health and age, 'A Broken Engagement' responds to a variety of intersectional factors obscured by the prevailing emphasis on class alone.

Generally speaking, the constituency of Leslie Halward's 'selving' had been informed by attitudes forged in the masculine ethos of the workplace and looked back to the 'common style of proletarian life' which Eric Hobsbawm believed was, by the 1950s, in full retreat. This situation is alluded to in Halward's radio drama *Afternoon at Excelsior Lodge* (1960), which, in terms of authorial subjectivity, the barely revealed and concealed aspects of an author's life he 'may not have wished to own', might – following Stephen Reynold's definition of 'autobiografiction' – be better described as an 'autobiodrama'.[93] Written as a 'two-hander', its dramatis personae feature a neglected author of short-stories Mark Finsbury and would-be-writer Vernon Ross, representing Leslie Halward and Geoffrey Trease respectively.[94] In terms of the "I/We" dilemma mentioned above, the play's somewhat threadbare mask of pseudonymity enabled Halward to reflect upon his life and how the experience of moving to the Worcestershire village of Guarlford had inadvertently severed him from 'his people' geographically and spiritually. Detached from the urban habitus that had been the fount of his authorial identity, Halward, as the following lines reveal, had effectively made himself redundant:

> Ross: Did you think you were forgotten?
> Finsbury: It's a hell of a long time since I had reason to think otherwise.
> Ross: Did the war make much difference to you?
> Finsbury: It finished me.

Ross: You mean, as a writer?

Finsbury: As a writer.

Ross: I should have thought

Finsbury: Before the war I was writing about the *poor* working-class, the unemployed, at first hand. I was one of 'em. Since the war there haven't been any. The people I used to write about no longer exist. I can't *feel* anything for factory workers who knock up fifteen or twenty (or thirty) quid in a five day week, have a fortnight's holiday with pay, and go off in their own cars.

Ross: You don't think they're worth writing about?

Finsbury: I didn't say that. They might be. I just don't know 'em, that's all. There Aren't any of my working-class left. There will be in a few years, the way things are going. Then I might be able to start again. I wonder if the missus has put that kettle on. (*EL,* 4)

In terms of subject matter and style, Halward's treatment of the short form contrasts dramatically with that of Peter Chamberlain whose stories, rather than constructed from lived-experience of working-class life, are lighter in tone and in this respect may be likened to the comic invention of the American short-story writer O. Henry. Walter Allen is disparaging of O. Henry, considering his work formulaic and partially responsible for the short-story's descent into 'the swamps of journalism and magazine fiction' during the early years of the twentieth century.[95] H. E. Bates however nurtured a secret admiration for O. Henry, considering him 'a trickster—the supreme example in the history of the short story of the showman 'wrapping it up so that the fools don't know it'.[96] O. Henry's 'wrapping it up' often consisted in the twist-in-the-tale ending and it is Chamberlain's use of this device in 'Mr Marris's Reputation' and elsewhere that prompts me to appropriate Graham Greene's term 'Entertainments' to distinguish Chamberlain's working-class 'slices of life' from his more experimental pieces.[97] As Andy Croft indicates, in terms of both subject matter and style, '[Chamberlain's] stories defy characterisation […] Their only common character is rather the enormous *variety* of subject, setting, style, voice and vocabulary, evoking different levels of class and culture (original emphasis)'.[98] Though Croft cites a sizeable extract from 'What the Hell?' he provides little, if any, critical commentary. Beyond the initial praise of I. A. Richards and the personal reminiscences of Walter Allen and Leslie Halward, there remained little, if any, further discussion of his work for almost thirty years. This would appear in 2011 and was provided by Bashir Abu-Manneh who, in researching the short-stories

published in the *New Statesman* between 1913 and 1939, discussed Chamberlain's work in relation to that of V. S. Pritchett.[99] Echoing the position taken in this thesis, Abu-Manneh finds:

> [The realist] interest in everyday life and experience […] shows how domestic, communal and workplace concerns informed the fictional practices of working-class and lower-middle-class writers during this period, focusing upon works in which class and realism take centre stage in a critical landscape 'dominated by modernism and empire'.[100]

While remarking positively on Chamberlain's formal innovations, Abu-Manneh registers a preference for working-class writing that displays the social commitment and the ordinariness of working-class life he found in the work of V.S. Pritchett, as consequence of which, his views on modernism in general, and Chamberlain's writing in particular, are downgraded. On one hand this is helpful for Abu-Manneh's argument provides a useful framework for the following discussion, on the other it is unfortunate because Chamberlain's writing is discussed less on its own merits than as a critical foil to that of Pritchett. In Abu-Manneh's opinion, Pritchett's perspective as a member of the lower-middle-class enabled him, to draw more 'highly-individuated social portraits' unlike those written in the 'detached documentary' style of Chamberlain, where he finds 'no sense in the encounter that the reader really knows the characters described, or has been shown what makes them distinctive individuals'.[101]

The following analysis of Chamberlain's short-stories, whilst in accord with Abu-Manneh's praise of V. S. Pritchett – a writer whose class status is in many ways closer to Leslie Halward than Peter Chamberlain – takes issue with the charge of inauthenticity registered in Abu-Manneh's description of Chamberlain's style as 'detached and documentary'.[102] To arraign Chamberlain on the grounds that his middle-class background proved – as with the criticisms levelled at, though clearly refuted in the work of Henry Green – a barrier to his knowledge of working-class experience amounts to a summary dismissal, at once disqualifying not only Chamberlain but anyone from 'outside' the working classes writing about them. Fortunately, this view has become less widespread. As I have noted, changes in Comintern policy oscillated between the proletkult hard-line, and the softening of approach exigent upon the adoption of popular front policy. Barbara Foley indicates how, following the 1934 Soviet Writers Congress, the emphasis in the art/propaganda debate turned to social realism where 'There was no necessity for the authors of socialist realist texts to come from the ranks of the proletariat'.[103] Chamberlain's observational skills and ear for working-class dialogue enabled him to construct authentic, convincing slices-of-working-class life, which combined comedy, individuation and compassion without lapsing into caricature, condescension or sentimentality.

A similarly negative connotation attaches to Abu-Manneh's use of the adjective 'Documentary'. He explains this by reference to 'Documentary exactitudes', a term coined by Valentine Cunningham who used it to describe the properties 'called upon to aid the outside, bourgeois observer of working-class life, as the best substitute available for the inside information he was short on'.[104] Considered as theatrical 'props', or 'Staffage': the pre-painted 'stick-on' characters employed by eighteenth-century landscape painters, the notion of 'documentary exactitudes' resonates with the 'materialism' Virginia Woolf discerned in Arnold Bennett's prose and whose 'craftsmanship', she asserted ironically, allowed 'not so much as a draught between the frames of the windows, or a crack in the boards'.[105]

As we have seen, Birmingham's Leslie Halward enthusiastically policed the boundaries of working-class prose harbouring an intense dislike of 'the casual contact and occasional eavesdropping' engaged in by middle-class individuals so as to divine the nature of working-class experience.[106] The term 'eavesdropping' is a double-edged sword however, communicating at once Halward's displeasure at literary 'slumming', whilst simultaneously functioning positively in respect of Chamberlain whose 'eavesdropping' provided such a wealth of working-class subject material. Bringing this unlikely pair of writers into conversation with one another affords an opportunity to contrast Halward's experientially informed narratives with Chamberlain's imaginatively-conceived *tranche de vie*. The fact that the latter employed 'Documentary exactitudes' or 'reality effects' should not invalidate the truth-to-life or authenticity of his stories *per se,* for to insist, as Woolf accused Bennett, that the employment of *realia* was an evasion or substitute for a fuller psychological delineation of character is untenable, as W. H. Auden suggests:

> The only genuine meaning of the word 'documentary' is true-to-life. Any *gesture*, any *expression*, any *dialogue* or *sound effect*, any *scenery* that strikes the audience [reader] as true-to-life is documentary whether obtained in the studio (i.e. crafted/staged) or on location (in the world). […] The effect of film is to create a powerful emotional attitude towards the emotional material presented. […] on the screen you never see *a* man digging in a field, but always Mr. McGregor digging in a ten acre meadow. It goes far beyond the novel in this (my emphasis).[107]

That Auden saw the documentary-film camera's indefatigable appetite as surpassing the novel is not to negate the imaginative writer's achievement. Just as for a cinema audience, the reader's emotional attitude to the words on the page is formed by 'relating' the plausibility of fictional representation to their own experience and Peter Chamberlain's use of 'documentary exactitudes' was aimed to achieve precisely this effect. I provide here a synopsis of Chamberlain's 'Mr. Marris' Reputation' for the reader to judge. [108]

Best described as a 'comic slice-of-life,' or as a 'working-class comedy of manners,' Chamberlain's story is set within the blackened, smoke encrusted walls of the Railway Hotel.

> Between it and the embankment a steep path, made from the cinders of forgotten engines, led up to the derelict station, forming a much prized Lovers Lane; so that a glass of port and an old-and-mild would often be the prelude to giggles and scuffling in its friendly darkness. (*WH*, 103)

Recounting the events that took place in this bleak industrial landscape where Eros came calling and Mr. Marris acquired his 'reputation', it is here we encounter *in medias res* the swarthy Alf Marris 'smelling of tarry rope, and wearing a permanent cloth cap' along with his two companions Bert Stamps and Bert Jemson in the 'moke room (the 's' having long since disappeared) of their regular Saturday haunt. Alf Marris is drawn by the allure of the attractive and striking Saturday barmaid Miss Fowler and, encouraged and emboldened by her smile, he ventures to engage her in conversation.

> 'Fine evening?' he tried doubtfully.
>
> Yes, isn't it replied Miss Fowler, as nice as you please, dazzling him with a perfectly ravishing smile, and nodding her head so that the ear-rings hopped about skittishly.
>
> Deeming this initimacy sufficient for the moment, he uttered a melancholy 'Ho' and carefully carried the beer back to the table. (*WH*, 106)

Surprised, possibly taken aback, to find his conversational gambit so warmly reciprocated, Alf Marris is temporarily lost for words as he follows Miss Fowler's movements behind the bar. Surprised by his uncustomary largesse, Alf's drinking companions look on dumbstruck at his subsequent arrival at the bar where the 'usually so-kept-to-herself', Miss Fowler 'thawed, and told him, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, that she would take a glass of port, thank you, and her respects, she was sure'. (*WH*, 107) Miss Fowler's demeanour is represented anthropomorphically in the description of 'beer bubbl[ing] from the tap overflowing slightly and dribbling into the jug set to catch it below', while the narrator communicates Alf's thoughts in free indirect discourse by describing 'the strong neck and the green earrings that came bursting from the wild wood of her hair, black as his own coals.' Chamberlain thus underscores their mutual attractedness and propels the story towards the 'assignation' in which Alf Marris acquires his 'reputation'. Drinking-up-time follows apace, during which Alf's two companions voice alternately expressions of disbelief and encouragement at the seeming success of Alf's romantic stratagems and where, surprised by his own extraordinary daring, Alf basks assuredly in his self-

modesty content merely to utter an acknowledging 'Ar' during the lacunae in their excited commentary.

> Setting down their empty mugs, and calling goodnight, they were departing when it happened. Miss Fowler, industriously polishing a glass, leant across the counter and called, apparently to the whole group, 'See you outside'. (*WH*, 108)

Clearly thrown into a panic, '[f]or a moment all three stood with wide-open mouths, rooted to the ground, then higgledy-piggledy scrambled through the door, Mr. Marris noticeably unsteadily'. (*WH*, 109) Ill-at-ease with this new found situation, his companions announce their respective goodnights before hurriedly departing and leaving Alf to contemplate his position alone. Outside he leans against a lamppost, one half of his mind telling him she was a 'clinking piece of stuff' the other annoyed at his friends' desertion. A couple emerge from Lovers Lane and stare in Alf's direction. Hearing the bolt of the pub door withdrawn, Alf's nerve fails. Almost running, he blunders off in the opposite direction, it was an extra half-mile's journey home but, by taking this route, he would be certain not to encounter his companions and thus disabuse them of his Lotharian prowess. Here dramatic irony works its subtle effects, for as readers we're privy to the 'actual' outcome of the story, whereas, unless Mr. Marris should determine to explain what *actually* transpired to his unknowing companions, his 'reputation' might remain unblemished. Added 'comic' value derives from the reader's awareness that Alf consciously contrived his deception; the long detour home the consequence of his pride, made for no other reason than to preserve his 'reputation.'

While disparaging of Chamberlain's working-class tales, Abu-Manneh offered a more encouraging, though qualified, response to the experimental pieces. That Chamberlain was a tireless observer of his own social milieu, is evident in the following extracts from 'Suburban Exercise' a piece that appeared in the *New Statesman* on the 23rd February 1935.[109]

> They have spoiled the master's shirts at the laundry again; they will have to make us an allowance that is all.
>
> These tennis balls will be clean enough for the Holloways.
>
> At last we have heard of a satisfactory parlour-maid; she has first-class references from one of the Gillotts who live in Hastings Road—quite a big house—but she asks too much money. Girls just will not go into service these days.

> In the shrubbery are lying the torn-up pieces of somebody's golf card.
>
> Her son is at school at Eastbourne, and getting on very well she says.
>
> Our roses have done very well this year; we have had a magnificent show, although we only have a man in twice a week to keep the place tidy.
>
> They are taking it in part exchange for a new Austin. It has done us very well and never let us down, but Gerald feels that he wants something different I suppose. (*WH*, 61–63)

Although these snippets are presented as anonymous pieces of everyday speech, they are not wholly transparent. Wrested from their original context and re-presented in the manner of surrealist collage, these textual fragments behave in a similar manner to the objects and figures in Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project, whereby, as J. M. Coetzee proposes, 'they act spontaneously to give off political energy. In so doing the fragments constitute the dialectical image, dialectical movement frozen for a moment, open for inspection, dialectics at a standstill: 'Only dialectical images are genuine images.'[110] Delivered employing the elaborated linguistic code and subject material freighted with middle-class signifiers, these fragments are unquestionably parodic, their cumulative effect a satirical treatment which looks forward to John Betjeman's *Summoned by Bells.* As a member of the middle classes himself, Chamberlain was well placed to 'eavesdrop' on the conversational utterances of his own social grouping. His 'Belgravian Exercise' moves from the suburban milieu to tackle a more cosmopolitan demographic.[111] Here numbered and extended extracts create a sequential verbal montage that parallels the visual imagery of the photo journal *Picture Post,* or more closely Walter Ruttman's silent film *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis,* by recording arbitrary incidents and events from everyday life to provide a non-narrative, stream-of-consciousness commentary taking in human interactions, phenomena, objects: shop window displays, and the signs and notices observed on a typical day in one of the capital's most affluent areas:

> 7. The driver of the taxi, which the two ladies hailed just before reaching the square, affected to be unaware of the dark looks given him by his colleagues, who were already waiting on the rank.
>
> 9. Further along the Square some dozen women and about half as many girls are standing on the pavement. What are they waiting for? They are expecting the children of the Duke and Duchess

> of Kent to leave for their walk, and do not appear to notice the cold wind which is blowing from the North.
>
> 21. From the Palladium the voice of Miss Gracie Fields, popular light comedienne, is repeated first by one wireless then another, so that, as I walk over the rough stones, her song is loud and continuous. She is singing to the tenants of the only 'conversion' in the mews, she is singing to the King and Queen, she is singing to the whole of the British Isles. Because of the command performance, many people have stayed at home tonight. [112]

What Abu-Manneh terms Chamberlain's 'Snapshot Documentary', is clearly redolent of the ethnographic turn discussed in the introduction. Here, the 'Documentary' impulse turns in upon itself, the 'configuration, identified by Stuart Hall as surrounding 'The Social Eye of *Picture Post',* that developed the social consciousness of wartime Britain', was all-pervasive, the 'Jakobsonian dominant' of the pre-war decade.[113] This was evident in Chamberlain's rendering of Alf Marris' smoke room amours which, had they derived from real life, may have provided invaluable material for one of Mass-Observation's participant observers. Whether reality or artifice, observation or imaginative creation, Chamberlain's 'exercises' are constructed from close observation and present as micro-sketches of the middle-class world he knew intimately and offer insights into lives and identities far beyond the working-class milieu that constituted the Birmingham group's more usual fayre.

Chamberlain's stylistic approach in the experimental pieces owes less to O. Henry than to the influence of John O'Hara. Walter Allen records that Chamberlain introduced him to O'Hara's writing by lending him *Appointment in Samarra* and *The Doctor's Son* and describes O'Hara as amongst the American 'novelists who came of age during the thirties when the condition of society as a major theme was all but inescapable'.[114] Testifying to the power of imaginative prose, Allen explained 'The great strength of John O'Hara, [...] had always lain in his precise, exhaustively detailed description of provincial society', and concluded 'And for all it is fiction, O'Hara's. *Appointment in Samarra* is probably the best and most illuminating account we have of the class system of a white American town.'[115] Whether, O'Hara raised Chamberlain's political consciousness is a moot point, that O'Hara's 'way of seeing' influenced his writing is unquestionable. In a New Yorker article titled 'The Eavesdropper's Secret: On John O'Hara', Charles McGrath, *contra* Halward, legitimises the process of eavesdropping by elevating it to an art form. Describing O'Hara as 'one of the great listeners of American fiction' he explains:

> [*The New Yorker*] became a place where [O'Hara] could develop his talent almost experimentally – without the pressures that went with novel writing. His earliest efforts, like most of what the magazine was publishing then, were virtually plotless little sketches – often snatches of overheard dialogue: a lonely man in a diner, for example, reminiscing about an old girlfriend. ('So Nan and I just chatted about nothing at all. I didn't make a pass at her and finally she suddenly stopped talking and I knew she was tired so I went home. Funny how you get over a girl like that').[116]

Chamberlain followed O'Hara's *New Yorker* strategy by using the pages of Britain's *New Statesman* to hone his craft and, just as O'Hara had made satirical play of American small town Babbittry, so Chamberlain laid bare the trivial pre-occupations of his English, middle-class peers often, as McGrath remarked of O'Hara, 'in a manner as fond as it is pointed'.[117]

In 'What the Hell?', Chamberlain renews his focus on working-class characters, more specifically that apotheosis of thirties and wartime petty-criminality the 'spiv', a type John Hampson described as 'a comparatively recent comer to fiction', and one who, despite nefarious black-marketeering aroused a degree of sympathy amongst those eager for the goods to which he (female spivs are curiously unrecorded) had access.[118] Formally speaking, this short piece takes the form of an interior monologue or soliloquy in which the speaker addresses a silent interlocutor possibly a friend or the reader.[119] Lacking biographical information it is difficult to speculate on Chamberlain's purpose here, although his 'insider knowledge' may well have motivated what may be read as an encoded critique of bourgeois values. In its imagining of another's experience and operating in a literary moment in which autobiography, fiction and the essay intersect, 'What the Hell?' is not wholly outside the parameters of autobiografiction.[120] Chamberlain's spiv exposes the vacuity of rabid consumerism revealing that 'the narrow plot of acquisitiveness' was not restricted to female desire alone. Unlike Brierley's scholarly outsiders, by so ostentatiously courting the approval of his peers, Chamberlain's creation has more in common with Leslie Halward's reputation-seeking Jim Belcher, and as with Halward, Chamberlain is equally percipient in discerning the vulnerability lying beneath his protagonist's machismo.

'What the Hell?' had drawn the attention of I. A. Richards who, having read it in the *New Statesman,* 'sent Chamberlain a postcard saying the story was the most original thing he had read for several years.'[121] Chamberlain's portrait of this 'Yewgottabetough' school graduate was certainly innovative, simultaneously a study in the use of 'Documentary exactitudes', a paean to rampant consumerism and a prescient treatment of the spiv character, it anticipates Greene's Pinky in *Brighton Rock* (1938), and moves beyond to the Milk Bars, Kitchen Sinks and Angry Young Men of post-war Britain.[122] The spiv character was by no means exclusive to the London scene as we saw in the behaviour of the would-be blackmailer Eric Gardiner and Eugene

Lorimer's con man mentor James Bartholomew who each lurked furtively within Walter Allen's fiction. Andy Croft, remarks that Hampson, attributed the ascendancy of the spiv character to the vogue for 'grim autobiographies' of the criminal underworld that were popular and influential during the thirties and constituted a form of writing which he thought appropriate for an audience 'living in a threatened society' and which he recommended for giving 'the authentic flavour of the present times,' unsentimental, realistic and contemporary.'[123] On face value 'What the Hell?' is a catalogue of possessions. Listing luxury goods: jewellery and accessories; clothes, shoes, luggage and furniture; referencing interior design, the speaker's good taste and social aspirations before culminating, somewhat disconcertingly, with people. Abu-Manneh suggests it may be read as a satire on the 'bourgeois documentary' form prevalent in thirties literature and epitomised in such journals as *Fact,* where the 'bourgeois documentary approach' is deployed 'against its dominant form and twist[ed] back upon itself' in such a way that 'a discourse used to read across the class divide' is turned to describing its own social origins'.[124] The view taken here aligns with Abu-Manneh with the caveat that, whereas the 'bourgeois documentary approach' merely recorded working-class objects or experience in order to create descriptive authenticity, in 'What the Hell?' material objects or possessions serve a metonymic function as an indictment of middle-class values. Voiced by a working-class subject sceptical of their value, rather than accoutrements they appear more as encumbrances which, though satisfying his wants, fail to satisfy his needs and are thus revealed as unfulfilling objects of desire whose power, once possessed, mysteriously evaporates.

At the outset, Chamberlain's speaker assures the reader 'I got most everything I *want*. Look at it all ways I have. Well then [my italics]…'. (*WH*, 1) The speaker's brusque idiom sets the tone:

> My gold cigarette-case is real class; it cost a mint of money in Regent Street. And I got a silver one; a big 'un with fine markings. Mostly I carry fags in the packet though. I can smoke expensive muck if I choose, but I like the twenty a bob best. (*WH*, 1)

Despite such jaunty conceit, the speaker undercuts the 'refinement' his luxury items confer by indicating a preference for carrying 'fags in the packet' thus expressing a groundedness rather than ostentation. In a similar manner he describes the impracticality of a gold wrist-watch 'which don't keep good time but looks swell, with a funny sort of face you can't read very well, but it's smart, with a metal thing for a strap, gold, that Jim told me was nancy (effeminate), only that's just his jealousy I guess' (*WH*, 1). The speaker's initial claims are frequently undercut in this manner. We move from descriptions of jewellery to clothes, shoes and travel goods to the interior of his flat. Here we're told: 'You can see everything's posh at a glance. Furnished

complete by a bloke who knew his job. He ought, he charged enough, Christ knows'. (*WH*, 2, 3). Rather than praising the craftsmanship, the work is valued purely by reference to its cost, again revealing the speaker's unfamiliarity with 'luxury' products.

Chamberlain's short narrative employs 'ungrammatical first-person narration' to construct his 'crisp, honest, down-to-earth, and heroically ordinary' working-class speaker.[125] In the absence of any further identifying detail, by using an appropriately restricted linguistic code, punctuated by tersely expressed opinions and the curious tone of self-deprecation, Chamberlain's character seemingly self-creates. If we take the speaker's shallow materialism at face value it is possible to read Chamberlain's story as a satire on consumerism. However, there is room for an alternative reading which stresses the contrary. For having amassed his cache of luxury items (cultural capital) in order to be well-thought of, behind the speaker's cocksure attitude lurks a desperately insecure and vulnerable individual whose possessions fail to reciprocate any sense of value. His material objects of desire found wanting, he seeks the reassurance of people to bolster his self-esteem

> And I got taste too; the girls in shops always tell me that. Pictures and rugs and ornaments and knick-knacks all in the very best of style. But nothing simply because it's expensive… 'When I give a party people come. No matter who they are, and some of them are real swells, they come. And they're always very civil to me. (*WH,* 3)

The naivety registered in his dealings with the 'real swells' from outside his social milieu and whose approval he so desperately needs is conspicuous, yet this dissolves into bathos when extended to his relationships with women who are described purely in terms of exchange value, as goods to be purchased rather than relationships to be formed:

> You should have seen the bit I took abroad last year. As smart a piece as any I saw in Nice. She cost a heap of money, but she was good value. I've had the real goods throw themselves at me in this very room. The better class they are the more loving they seem to be. You'd be surprised at the things some of them do. And finely built girls too, Of course it's the money most of them want – I'm not such a fool as not to know that – but after all… . (*WH*, 3)

As Nicola Caramina suggests, '[t]he demands of a consumer society replace love with Eros and sensuality. In a society based upon consumerism and the commodification of individuals, even love becomes instrumental as it is bought and sold in a market of social exchange where individuals become objectified with disposable brands'.[126] Chamberlain's 'possession proud' protagonist delineates the 'narrow plot of acquisitiveness and desire' Virginia Woolf discerned in the writing of working-class women. As Pamela Fox maintains the acquisitive impulse merely

registers the working-class individual's simple requirement for something better in life and in this respect she views it a form of resistance which, 'posed against more explicitly oppositional narrative formulas, […] impels the writing of a secondary plot that tells another, equally pressing, class story.'[127] Though here, rather than adopting the condescending perspective of the 'benevolent spectator', Chamberlain withholds judgement by allowing his working-class protagonist to speak for himself.

The interest of Chamberlain's characterisation lies in the fact that, despite his character's bluff exterior and seemingly credulous desire for material possessions, there is an underlying degree of self-knowledge; the recognition that whether 'girls' or 'swells', 'it's the money most of them want – I'm not such a fool as to not know that'. Just as the initial allure of his material possessions is found to be empty and unfulfilling, so too the adulation of the fair-weather friends he hopes to 'purchase' but who will doubtless evaporate when the money runs out. Fortunately perhaps, he still values older, longstanding friendships more. As he says in the closing lines 'And I'm generous with it. Nothing's too good for a friend of mine. Yes, I've got pretty well everything I want. Well then? What the sweet Hell?'. (*WH*, 4) Despite confidently reiterating his 'wants', one might conjecture his 'needs' remain conspicuously absent. Closing with a near repetition of the opening line, Chamberlain's story registers the circularity and insatiability of consumer desire.

In chapter two I discussed John Hampson's short-story 'Man About The House' and examined some of the cultural issues raised by the story's content, particularly the male breadwinner model and contemporary notions of masculinity. As remarked above, issues of gender have frequently been cast as peripheral in traditional critiques of working-class writing but, as Christopher Hilliard indicates 'representing domestic situations implicitly emphasise[s] there is more to working-class life than work'.[128] The following analysis of John Hampson's *Saturday Night at the Greyhound* takes its cue from Stanislava Dikova's review of *The Proletarian Answer to the Modernist Question* which, while affirmative of Nick Hubble's project, suggests that placing greater emphasis on queer writers and authors from cross-cultural backgrounds might provide a fuller picture of intersectionality'.[129] Hampson's *Saturday Night at the Greyhound* affords a unique opportunity to examine issues of working-class culture from the perspective of queer writing in order to consider intersubjective relationships at both *intra-* and *inter* class levels. As we saw, many of the autobiographical and socio-cultural issues which permeate Hampson's shorter fiction were already visible in his earlier novels and surfaced in a series of *bildungsromane* in which the protagonist's world view was frequently that of the homosexual and whose persona had frequently been constructed from his own childhood experience. Hampson's representations

therefore assist in the recovery of what, during the inter-war period, was not so much a 'submerged' as 'legislatively suppressed' voice. His novel offers further evidence that Birmingham group narratives not only responded to but were often pre-figurative of the contemporary discussion of working-class writing.

The realist novel's impulse to document and describe was discussed earlier with reference to Nicola Wilson's distinction between 'observed' and 'inhabited' space. John Hampson makes frequent reference to 'observed' space, and, in *O Providence* (1932), this becomes a formal device whereby the novel's four sections (Five Ways, The House in Laurel Road, Rowantree End and Park View), are shaped around the vicissitudes of the Stonetun family's experience at each location. Charting their fortunes from the self-evidently opulent, tree-lined avenues and large staff required to service 'Five Ways' to 'the six-foot square of ragged grass bordered by dry-brown earth' that constituted 'Laurel Road's' front garden, the youngest child Justin Stonetun (the Hampson persona) describes how, temporarily thrown upon their uppers, the Stonetuns experience life in the confines of the working-class artisan's home: 'The house itself was small and narrow, possessing a thin hall, a narrow stairway and nine small rooms. Allys Stonetun loathed it. […] the house was furnished barely, essential things, beds and chairs, a table. A few more pieces too, her own personal possessions, relics of other days'. (*OP*, 106). The proximity and lack of privacy is emphasised from a child's perspective as Justin describes his father 'face smeary with lather', calling the children to wake, and in the sharing of bedrooms where an elder brother impatiently helps dress a younger sibling, with the mother downstairs in the kitchen where 'she worked like a galley slave sewing and scrimping'. Outside '[a] tram-car came rattling along […] as crowds of dark-clad people hurried along the pavements, men on bicycles pushed along the roadway. So many things to see'. (*OP*, 106). The shaping influence of the familial and domestic — the 'close quick relationships', 'the continuous flow and recoil of sympathy', 'the essential process of living' Raymond Williams found in D. H. Lawrence's writing, not to mention Lawrence's profound influence on Hampson, were all clearly evident in the scenes he described here.[130]

In *Strip Jack Naked* (1934) the central character Ted Borlay (a further incarnation of the Hampson persona) undertakes to marry Laura the wife of his recently deceased elder brother Alf, to whom he had become fixated and enslaved. Laura and Ted's marriage begins somewhat vicariously, initially a substitute for Ted's cathectic projections, his marriage to Laura may allow him to foster his brother's child. From Laura's perspective this course of action owes more to the moral and economic necessity; that of providing for the child, though in time the couple are reconciled to their new found situation and move from beneath the shadow cast by Alf's death to

enjoy a companionate marriage with a second child and hence a family of their own. Again the Lawrencian influence is plain, no less in the American edition of *Strip Jack Naked* being retitled '*Brothers and Lovers'* to avoid a clash with Douglas Goldring's novel of the same name, but likewise in its content as Mercer Hampson Simpson explains:

> In *Sons and Lovers* Paul Morel's mother-fixation prevents his marrying until after her death as, it seems, was the case with Lawrence himself. Hampson's American title is perhaps more apposite than his British one since, though Tom was mentally — psychically, in his imagination, not physically — his brother's lover, both brothers are, in turn Laura's lovers; and again as with Lawrence, not until the death of the dominating loved one in the family is the surviving lover free to choose another partner outside his family.[131]

Although Hampson's literary output was the most prolific of the Birmingham group writers, my discussion is necessarily restricted due to limitations of space, not to mention the restricted availability of Hampson's novels. The foregoing discussion has been greatly assisted by Mercer F. Hampson Simpson's, M. A. dissertation 'The Novels of John Hampson' (1975) which, beyond Walter Allen's critical evaluations, contemporary reviews, and 'introductions' to reprints of *Saturday Night at the Greyhound,* provides, to my knowledge, the only extended discussion of Hampson's writing..[132] The plot-based summaries of *O Providence* and *Strip Jack Naked* examine the 'psychological aetiology' that Mercer F. Hampson Simpson believed was a persistent factor in Hampson's work. Though biographically accurate and informative, his 'account of Hampson's life and work inevitably suffers by being a product of its time. Written in 1975, a mere eight years after the decriminalisation of homosexual acts registered in the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 and other changes in clinical criteria that had only recently ceased to consider homosexuality a mental illness, Mercer F. Hampson Simpson's assessment is skewed by the prevailing discourse which regarded homosexuality as requiring concealment rather than disclosure, though which, from today's more enlightened perspective may appear as none other than prudish solicitude.[133] Such attitudes are articulated in Mercer Hampson Simpson's comment that *Strip Jack Naked* represented an attempt to project a more normative account of himself, he suggests '[John Hampson] *must* have felt that the time had come to attempt an artistic escape from the *limitations of his personality'* – a view which, in the absence of an autobiography or explicit biographical detail is unverifiable and more possibly a function of Mercer F. Hampson Simpson's presumption.[134] Given contemporary attitudes it is possible that Hampson may have wished to conceal his homosexuality, though whether he might escape the 'limitations of his personality' by having his characters adopt the 'active' (as opposed to passive) role of the heterosexual male privileged in

normative accounts of sexuality is another question. Mercer F. Hampson Simpson nevertheless rehearses contemporary psychoanalytic concepts to press his view that Hampson *wanted* to assume a more active masculine role and he consequently reads Ted Borlay's marriage to Laura as 'a move from homosexual to heterosexual, from passive role to active role', citing this as an instance of how Hampson sought to create *positive* centres in his novels as opposed to 'flatly homosexual ones' (my emphasis).[135] This clearly has implications for Mercer F. Hampson Simpson's discussion of Hampson's novels in that, while sensitive to their author's homosexuality, by demonstrating the connections between Hampson's life experience and the formal aspect of his novels, he considers John Hampson's homosexuality as having been a constraining, at times, negative influence upon his work. Yet, written some ten years prior to Mercer F. Hampson Simpson's account, a seemingly more percipient and enlightened Walter Allen understood that:

> In almost all Hampson's novels there appears the figure of the young man, often a youngest son —Tom in *Saturday Night at the Greyhound*, Johnny in *Family Curse* — who is, or sees himself to be in permanent estrangement from society because he is a homosexual. He is wiser, more clear-sighted, more disinterested, than the other characters; he sees through them and foresees the consequences of their behaviour, even though he may be powerless to prevent them; though he participates in the action, he is also its chorus.[136]

Perceptive in itself, Allen's encomium encourages a more positive reading of Hampson's novels, one that is alive to the perspicacity with which he imbues his characters. Again, the intersectional approach is helpful in supporting the analysis of a gendered dynamic operating within class-based narratives whilst also addressing questions of authorial subjectivity. Nevertheless, while fully supportive of Hampson's project, Allen's comments are balanced by those of William Plomer who, having read *O Providence,* wrote to Hampson remarking 'the whole thing seems to me interesting as a case history rather than as a work of literature'.[137] Plomer's observation reiterates the issues of concealment and disclosure that exercised Mercer F. Hampson Simpson and prompts a fuller examination of the autobiographical and cathartic elements in Hampson's writing. Indeed, by describing *O Providence* as autobiographical rather than autobiography *per se,* Mercer F. Hampson Simpson points up the subtle distinction between adjective and noun that resonates in the term 'autobiografiction'. Probably unaware of the terminology, Hampson's novels, as with those of his Birmingham group compeers, are readily assimilated into the bounds of this capacious genre. The spiritual experience engendered by love, its complications, sorrows, and the intensified emotions described by Stephen Reynolds were doubtless familiar to the

sensitive and complex Hampson. By creating fictional characters able to articulate and express his concerns and pre-occupations; in 'recasting the spiritual experience of the introspective individual as that of another', Hampson may have stumbled upon a means of psychological consolation both for himself and his readers.

In some respects *Saturday Night at the Greyhound* might be considered more suitable for inclusion in the discussion of 'work' undertaken in Chapter one, as Christopher Hilliard suggests:

> Depicting the working-class at play was another aspect of the concern to represent writers' "own people" on their own terms.' Pubs have an understandable prominence in this literature, not just because of their place in working-class leisure, but also because the pub is a site where work and leisure meet.[138]

However, Hilliard cautions that: 'Despite its setting, the novel is no ode to the people's alehouse.'[139] Originally conceived as a play, the three parts of the novel are set in the eponymous public house and take place during the eight hours which constitute the publican's working 'day'. Divided thus – 'Nightfall at the Greyhound', 'The House Opens' and 'The House Closes' – it follows the Aristotelian unities in providing not only the narrow spatial compass of tragedy, but also the temporal divisions comprising: exposition, complication and resolution. Hampson's novel traces the fortunes of its three central characters Freddy Flack, his wife Ivy and her brother Tom Oakley as they attempt, though ultimately fail, to run a public house in the East Midland coalfield.[140]

Having both worked for their parents in the well-run and successful Crown & Cushion public house in Birmingham, Ivy and Tom were able to live well, buy nice clothes and enjoy a social life and social status commensurate with that of the petty-bourgeoisie.[141] Having gone their separate ways, Ivy through marriage and Tom to find work in London, brother and sister are reunited following the untimely deaths – within an hour of each other – of their parents. Each receives an inheritance of two hundred and fifty pounds, the cautious Tom banking his portion while Ivy views hers as capital with which to embark upon a business venture with her husband Freddy. Six months later Tom receives a letter from his sister informing him that she and Freddy intend to run a public-house and imploring him to join them.[142] The charming Freddy Flack is irresponsible, spendthrift and promiscuous. Ivy, schooled by respectable and professional Birmingham victuallers is cautious, conscientious and professional. Alternately, suspicious, besotted and charmed by her wayward husband, she hopes to placate his restlessness by investing her inheritance in a public house. 'The sum [being] too small to get any but the meanest of out-

of-the-way houses in Birmingham', their enterprise commences in Grovelace (Ashover) a small mining village in the East Midland coalfield, the aim being to make enough money before returning to Birmingham with the prospect of managing a larger more lucrative concern. (*SN*, 41)

Functioning as the Hampson persona described by Walter Allen above, Ivy's brother Tom dotes on his sister and is disparaging of her marriage to the irresponsible Freddy Flack. William Plomer categorised their marriage as 'a mating of attractive irresponsibility with wishful thinking'.[143] Once ensconced in the Greyhound and its bleak environs, the Flack ménage is augmented by two further pairs of characters'. Initially, two locals: the embittered Mrs. Tapin as charwoman and her daughter the attractive, ambitious Clara, as barmaid. Added to Hampson's cast are two overnight visitors: the anodyne Roy Grovedon son of the late Squire and his sophisticated, rather pretentious, London girlfriend Ruth Dorme. With 'casting' complete Hampson's principals are set to perform their roles amidst a chorus of generally unsympathetic villagers.[144]

Having established 'a complete community encompassing the whole social spectrum', Hampson has only to light the blue touch paper and retire as these highly combustible characters ignite in a narrative fiction where aphorisms such as 'character is action' and 'a man's character is his fate' leave little room for conjecture as to how the story might end.[145] Unable to escape the clutches of providence, Fred proceeds to squander the pub's takings by ingratiating himself to the locals in the mistaken belief he can cajole them into liking him. However, unlike the gentle folk who comprise the rustic chorus in Hardy's Wessex, the Derbyshire miners, schooled in hardship and engaged daily in having to tear their living from the earth, are ruthless and cunning and it is they who manipulate Fred. Christopher Hawtree remarks how 'Hampson was able to show with hideous plausibility how the night's remorseless sequence of events had their diverse origins in circumstances and conditions that go back not only months, but years,' and as Mercer F. Hampson Simpson suggests, there is an 'Ibsenite certainty' in all of this, although the workings of the malign fate that stalked Hardy's fictions may likewise have hovered offstage.[146] With the exception of Tom Oakley, the other characters show little self-knowledge or capacity to reflect on their behaviour. Whether Hampson, as he suspected, overdetermined his characters' fates is unclear, though in writing to his publisher that 'the characters lack resistance to providence' he appeared to nurture some regret.[147] The air of tragic inevitability ensures that Fred, Ivy and Tom will lose their livelihood and any possibility of realising their dreams.

In its overlapping of class, gender and setting *Saturday Night at the Greyhound,* almost anticipates an intersectional reading. Drawing from his childhood experience to portray the male characters of Freddy Flack and Tom Oakley (the Hampson persona) and having traced not only

their differing life trajectories but also how notions of authorial subjectivity become worked into fictional representations, it is here the 'autobiografictional' notion of concealment comes into play. Hampson contrasts the thoughtful Tom Oakley who, as a gay man in the 1930s, unsurprisingly wishes to remain prudent in his discretion, with the philandering, foolhardy and arrogant Freddy who ingratiates himself to the locals hoping to gain their respect. We're told how 'in giving him life Freddy's mother died' and that, neglected by his 'hard and distant father' he was instead indulged by a spinster aunt who worshipped him, 'no matter what trouble he got into, she found an excuse for him' […] A strong desire for popularity, and a distinct aptness for games won Freddy a certain amount of success amongst his school fellows'. (*SN*, 62) On his father's death at the tender age of fifteen, 'Miss Flack found in him her ideal man; broad-shouldered and slim, his proud bearing and arrogant manner were, she felt, supremely masculine. To wait on him hand and foot seemed only his due; she did it willingly, and he let her'. (*SN*, 63) Having placed the 'broad-shouldered and slim', ideal of manhood that is Freddie Flack atop the marble plynth of essentialist and misogynistic presumption, in making Tom Oakley, to use an old-fashioned term, the 'hero' of his novel, and, by reading against the grain of pre-war sexual politics, Hampson subverts both Miss Flack's and the contemporary patriarchal culture's celebration of masculine sexuality. While clearly oblivious regarding present day notions of identity and gender-constructedness, Hampson, viewed 'nurture' as a significant factor in identity formation and in this respect the discursive element of his narrative is pre-figurative of the work of Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick. Doubtless ideologically trapped within the contemporary purview that legitimized a chauvinistic belief in female inferiority, Mercer F. Hampson Simpson attributes John Hampson's 'passivity' and 'bias' (sexual orientation) to 'childhood ill-health [which] isolated him from the rough-and-tumble of normal boyish pursuits and friendships and made him dependent firstly upon elder women and ultimately upon himself'.[148] The character of Tom Oakley thus represents the antithesis to prevailing conceptions of masculinity. Having suffered paternal abuse as a child and raised by nursemaids and female carers, rather than developing into the 'arrogant' and 'supremely masculine' type represented by Freddy, Hampson was inadvertently more sensible of the woman's position and chose instead to represent himself heteronymically as the sensitive Tom.

As intimated earlier, though unable to provide an intersectional analysis of ethnic or racial discrimination, Hampson's story does articulate the predicament of the 'incomer' in what is an unfamiliar, and in this case, seemingly hostile environment. The contrast between Tom and Ivy's comfortable existence in Birmingham and the experience they undergo in their new setting is marked. While homesickness accounts for feelings of separation from the domestic known and

familiar, immersion in a seemingly hostile environment has more far-reaching consequences. Psychoanalyst Karim G. Dajani explains how '[removing] a person from a location organised by a particular set of cultural practices and placing them in another location organised by a substantially different set of cultural practices – can shock and alter the ego'.[149] Dajani employs Bourdieu's concept of habitus: 'the set of durable transposable dispositions inculcated from a collective in which an individual is embedded' as the means by which to analyse the impact of 'cultural dislocation' on bi-cultural patients. [150] While the 'shock' experienced by the immigrant normally derives from more dramatic and contrasting cultural practices such as language or dress codes, the principle remains essentially the same. Tom's response to the locals is illustrative here for despite his lower-middle class status, the locals find virtue in Tom paradoxically admiring his qualities of work and aloofness, and to a certain extent their feelings are reciprocated, as Hampson's narrator explains:

> [Tom] in turn gained respect for them. They were difficult to understand, these people; their hard exterior hostility was something he had never met before. The gaunt countryside was reflected in their grim faces. Suffering and poverty made them hard and callous in their speech, though drink betrayed them, as sentimental. Always on Saturday evening they sang old songs, preferring the mawkish type. Even the children possessed no pity; the harshness of life eliminated it from them. At first Tom thought them animals, their fierceness, frightened him. They laughed harshly at stories of cruelty that turned him sick. In spite of it all, he admired them; their persistent struggle to gain the means of their existence was great in its way. (*SN*, 70)

Hampson captures the contradictory nature of Tom's encounter — simultaneously one of alarm and admiration — with the inhabitants of what Dajani identifies as a 'location organized by a substantially different set of cultural practices.'[151] The 'shock' Tom registers doubtless owes much to Hampson's own petty-bourgeois origins and upbringing. In correspondence with Mercer F. Hampson Simpson, Leslie Halward remarked 'I always felt that although he had a great compassion for the working class he was too genteel to write convincingly about them.'[152] Halward's observation illustrates the liminal nature of the Birmingham Group writers, whose status, ranged across a continuum of positions *within* the 'broad church' defined loosely as working-class. As we have seen, Leslie Halward's conception of 'authenticity' in literary depictions of working-class life was constructed upon the contemporary male-oriented critique of workplace and labour relations. He conceived of the working class as a distinct caste rather than as a socio-political construct. Yet his assessment of Hampson was not wholly inaccurate, for although the above passage finds Hampson's 'narrator' describing 'Tom's' feelings, it could

equally be regarded as the genteel Hampson in dialogue with himself as he attempts to determine his own identity and social status.

It is relevant perhaps that the Soviet Writers Congress of 1934 initiated the dismantling of prescriptive notions erstwhile disseminated by Proletkult in favour of a social realism attuned to the perspectives of both working- and middle-class writers 'prepared to write Balzac-style nineteenth-century realism in support of the class struggle.'[153] Nick Hubble cites from *Some Versions of Pastoral* where William Empson proposes pastoral offers itself as an alternative to a proletarian literature *per se*, by bridging 'the social divide between the metropolitan intelligentsia, and the workers, farmers and peasants', arguing that its 'double-attitude', that of the 'complex man to the simple one ('I am in one way better, in another not so good')' offers a more appropriate means by which to realise the social changes advocated at the Soviet Writers Congress.[154] As Hubble explains, it was by such means that the term 'proletarian literature' underwent reconfiguration from *sectarian* to more *heterogeneous* purposes and was thus able to offer intersubjective encounters from a variety of positions with 'the key intersubjective connections often as much between genders as classes' (my emphasis).[155]

John Hampson was under no illusion regarding his dual-attitude in respect of class. Despite his high regard for the sons, (daughters and offspring) of toil, his narrator concluded the above passage by asserting 'There was not one of them with whom he would have changed places; sooner he would have died'. (*SN*, 70) Though Hampson's persona as it surfaces in the figure of Tom Oakley might seem to evoke the kind of revulsion expressed by individual members of the genteel middle-class/literary intelligentsia toward the masses, Hampson's narrator qualifies this:

> The singing was a herd movement, a mass urge to something they felt better than their daily existence. As a mass Tom disliked them, but many of them as individuals he liked very much. […] Tom sighed, who was he to judge them? He could not have endured life as they led it. There was no merit in despising genuine hardship. The poverty of the country folk seemed even more distressing than that of the townspeople. It seemed the rule rather than the exception. (*SN*, 112)

Ivy was less charitable, she found the Derbyshire folk rebarbative, and although 'they had some virtues' […] their vices seemed many. They were slow to like strangers, though quick enough to hate. She knew how to treat them in their own coin with contempt and haughtiness'. (*SN*, 47) As the following passage reveals, Ivy feels her cultural dislocation sorely:

> She did not care for serving in the tap-room. There the men seemed to keep their natural rough hardness, in the smoke-room and bar they behaved with an affected restraint as though they were at a funeral. But in the tap-room their rough vigour alarmed her, they were utterly different from the saucy Birmingham boys, with whom she was fully able to cope. (*SN*, 86)

Having fallen upon circumstances similar to those experienced by Hampson's parents, his narrative not only provides an authentic and detailed exploration of the socially-dislocated city dweller but offers an *intra*-class perspective revealing the harshness of working-class lived experience beyond the urban centre where, rather than engaging in rural idealisation, Hampson inverts romanticised notions of the bucolic. As Mercer F. Hampson Simpson remarks: '[I]n its realistic depiction of the social conditions obtaining in the area, [the] novel relates to the themes of social amelioration, so popular amongst his contemporaries of the 1930's.'[156]

Notwithstanding his unflinching portrayal of the locals, Hampson doesn't forego the opportunity to indulge his distaste at the pretentions of the Metropolitan intellectual elite as represented in the figures of Roy Grovedon and Ruth Dorme. Mercer F. Hampson Simpson considered this a weakness in the novel, and although he conceded it was probably Hampson's intention 'to give social depth by providing a cross-section of Grovelace society as well as added comment from intellectual, sophisticated London', he considered their appearance rather contrived.[157] I would counter that Hampson's attempt to present a social cross-section is in close accord with Margaret Storm Jameson's concept of 'Soundings' whereby, as Elizabeth Maslin explains, '[Jameson] offered readers a chance to measure the depths of a contemporary crisis through close inspection of a sample community containing all the critical elements.'[158] As we have remarked, the documentary film movement became the 'Jakobsonian dominant' during the inter-war period, its techniques, in particular the montage effect, enthusiastically appropriated and incorporated into novelistic technique.[159] John Hampson adopted the device quite early on as Lara Feigel indicates:

> *Saturday Night at the Greyhound* employs cross-class montage to juxtapose the young squire, and his friend Ruth, with the working-class local people who run and patronise the Greyhound Pub. Hampson montages their perspectives on each other, so that Ruth is mocked for idealising the working class: "these people she felt really lived" (*SN*, 95) and, at the same time, the working-class Mrs. Tapin is mocked for immediately coming to the wrong conclusion about Ruth and assuming that she is a prostitute: "If Master Roy wanted fancy women he had better seek elsewhere". (*SN*, 122)[160]

Unlike their male counterparts in the novel, the female characters are more resolute, the venal and embittered Mrs. Tapin excessively so. Possibly staged as a warning to Freddy Flack against taking liberties with her daughter Clara, she viciously kills the Flack's pet Greyhound. As allegorical figures Mercer F. Hampson Simpson suggests Mrs. Tapin and her daughter Clara represent 'destructive and active' characters.[161] In the following thumbnail sketch, Hampson's narrator describes them in brief sentences echoing the 'matter of fact' taken for granted calculation behind their motivations: 'Mrs. Tapin liked [her daughter's] guile. It was worthy of her own skill. She had always been clever with men herself. Though it took her five years to get the old Squire after her. But she had done it and got a husband into the bargain. Times had changed the men were not so easy as they used to be'. (*SN*, 62)

The working-class Tapin's are montaged against the visitors. On Ruth Dorme's arrival at the Greyhound, Hampson's narrator loses no time cutting to the quick of Metropolitan perceptions. Having advised Ruth that she would most likely be served 'bread, cheese and pickled onions', Roy Grovedon returns from the kitchen to inform her that 'Tomato soup, tinned, will be ready for us in five minutes'. (*SN*, 92) The adjective 'tinned' clearly registers Roy's misgivings and reflects wider class attitudes concerning the nutritional value of working-class foodstuffs. As John Carey ruefully remarks '[w]e saw that E. M. Forster's Leonard Bast eats tinned food, a practice that is meant to tell us something significant about Leonard, and not to his advantage.'[162] Ruth is intrigued nevertheless:

> A meal at the Greyhound might be amusing. It would be something to talk about. Anything, so long as it had novelty, that was the thing nowadays. People would enjoy hearing of her meal among the miners. If it proved too ghastly she could embroider it a little. Ruth Dorme, an unmarried woman of thirty, found life rather boring in spite of her money. She was fairly clever and considered to be an intellectual by her friends. Knowing that, she let it rule her life. She dare not say or do anything she considered traitorous to the intellect with which she allowed herself to be endowed. Few people liked her. (*SN*, 89-90)

Imagining herself as a cultural anthropologist returning to the city with tales of the uncivilised provinces, Hampson's narrator quietly dismantles Ruth's metropolitan pretensions. In the following passage Hampson deploys the 'rhetoric of domesticity' to consider the Greyhound's guest room, where, having decided to eat and stay overnight we proceed to the first of Ruth's 'readings':

> While waiting for the next course, she photographed the room on her memory. It was quaint, possessing a certain stiff formality, not unlike a stage-setting. Over the fireplace hung an enlarged photo of a pleasant-faced old man, probably the landlady's father. Two huge and hideous blue vases flanked it. Ruth considered them gravely "No wonder," she said, "the working-classes do not care to use their best rooms." After a quick look round Roy agreed. The room was obviously a museum of family happenings, the collected result of many marriages and deaths. (*SN*, 93)

As Hampson's narrator intimates, there is something calculated and pre-meditated about Ruth's persona, the disparity between her voiced inner-feelings regarding the sitting room contrasts dramatically with her outward opinion as expressed to Ivy:

> The spare room was beautiful, Ruth decided immediately. The furniture was of dark oak in severe lines, the bedstead was big and looked most comfortable. On the walls was a milk-grey paper; three narrow frames of black wood containing silhouettes were their only ornaments. The curtains and bedspread were of pale grey cretonne patterned with a formal design of cornflowers. Narrow bedside carpets of a matching blue shade were on the dark wooden floor. By the bedside stood a tiny arm-chair upholstered in dark grey plush. Ruth turned to Ivy. "What an exquisite room," she said. (*SN*, 99)

Here Hampson effectively turns the notion of 'observed' space on its head, the passage revealing more about Ruth than the interior she ostensibly describes. Having catalogued the greys that comprise the muted colour scheme of what seems a particularly drab and depressing room, Ruth's choice of the adjective 'exquisite' seems either disingenuous or at best condescending although it is not implausible that the restricted palette of this utilitarian décor may have been momentarily tangential with the ephemeral nature of metropolitan tastes.

In rendering a wide range of characters, Hampson's novel offers a detailed exploration of inter-subjective relationships by means of both intra- and inter-class montage. Rather than being considered negatively, the perspectives Hampson offered as a gay man, should be acknowledged as a positive force. Although he may have sought to repress his homosexuality, his narratives reveal him as alive and sensitive to discriminatory systems of class and gender still relevant today. As Andy Croft observes:

> [I]n the thirties [Hampson] briefly pioneered a form of intense autobiographical fiction, combining a 'hard-boiled' prose style with experiments in narrative technique. He found in provincial middle-class family life the materials of Greek tragedy, and confronted his own sexual history in fiction at a time when honesty in such matters was difficult, championing the

emotionally disinherited and the weak in a decade dominated by the institutionalised bullying he so hated.[163]

By assisting the recovery of the submerged voices eclipsed by sectarian readings and, for wresting an alternative 'way of seeing' from the myopia of a predominantly 'male gaze', the intersectional approach has proven invaluable. Ever alert to the complexities of class, setting, gender and familial relationships, it provides a more nuanced and sympathetic critical apparatus with which to address the subject material of Birmingham group narratives. In a period and occupation where hegemonic masculinity was the order of the day, and where the heroic miner, lionised by figures such as Orwell, had come to symbolise both working-class solidarity and collectivity, Arthur Gardner's Oliver Twist-like temerity in asking for something more must surely have been viewed as weak-kneed individualism. *Sandwichman* tells a different tale however, for its protagonist's confrontation with sectarian convention was informed by the tragic consequences of Brierley's own lived experience. Though ultimately doomed to his public humiliation in the 'stocks' of an advertiser's sandwich-board, Arthur's desire for something better than a 'life down the pit' exacted a terrible price. Using a generic template resembling Stephen Reynold's 'autobiografiction' which, as Max Saunders proposes, 'facilitate[d] readers' empathy, not just because it [cut] the material free from the name and person of the author, but because the aesthetic work that fiction performs on autobiography encouraged greater imaginative engagement with the material', Brierley was able to communicate the experience of his educational deprivation to a wider public. Whether William Beveridge read Brierley's *Sandwichman* is unknown, although 'Ignorance' – his shorthand for greater public access to educational opportunity – constituted one of the 'Five Giants' addressed by his post-war reforms.

Leslie Halward's objective stance and the pitiless precision with which he presented the tragic nature of Annie's self-sacrifice attains a universal significance by attesting to the distinct sadness behind all such selfless acts. In its dramatisation of lived experience Halward's 'A Broken Engagement' aligns with Frank O'Connor's conception of the short-story as giving voice to a member of a 'submerged population group', one of the myriad unheard, non-heroic individuals who provide such an intense awareness of human fortitude.[164] In 'Mr. Marris' Reputation', Peter Chamberlain showed it was possible to write about working class life without having been born into it and that the possession of writerly skills based upon close observation alone could successfully furnish authentic accounts of working-class experience. In 'What The Hell?' Chamberlain's spiv character remarks unironically on the value of his possessions. As his portfolio enlarges to include women and friendships as objects of consumption, the story

provides a jarring critique not only of the objects themselves but also the acquisitive cultural and material values Chamberlain's own caste foist upon the working-classes. John Hampson's *Saturday Night at The Greyhound,* explored intersectional categories of class, place and gender. As had Brierley, Hampson developed what was effectively an 'autobiografictional' genre with which to examine the psychological experience of cultural dislocation by deploying the techniques of documentary montage to analyse notions of class. Hampson's *Saturday Night At The Greyhound* is in many ways prescient of more recent developments in both the novel form and the critical analysis of it. As with his other works, his narratives customarily offer the psychological consolation of one who has experienced the hardships his protagonists endure. As Stephen Reynolds claimed autobiografiction 'cut the material free from the name and person of the author'. In Hampson's case it provided a formal medium by which to encode and conceal his homosexuality in a decade where prevailing attitudes deriving from the same misogynistic frameworks that informed the sectarian, male-oriented critique of working-class literature may have proven detrimental.

Recourse to historical precedent as a means of explaining or contrasting the successes or failures of an earlier epoch with those of the present day has become deeply ingrained. A case in point being the repeated invocations of the 1930s which have become something of a journalistic trope; appropriated by parties of whichever stripe, they are frequently trawled for spiritual succour be it celebratory or salutary. Jonathan Freedland recently described the decade as 'rhetorical shorthand' a 'two word warning from history'.[165] However, while the Wall Street crash, and its economic aftermath, remain powerfully evocative, focus on the economic and political aspects alone has tended to overshadow other areas of contemporary experience that would similarly benefit from the 'warnings of history' or the perspectives granted by 'hindsight' and especially those relating to the intersectional, 'holy trinity' of class, race and gender issues overlooked due to the prevailing focus on male-oriented concerns. Fortunately, more enlightened approaches to matters of sexuality and gender would materialise.

As noted in the introduction, Ben Clarke and Nick Hubble stressed that '[a]ny return to working-class writing must be informed by feminist, post-colonial and queer studies, exploring the intersections of class with *gender, ethnic and sexual identities* rather than reverting to earlier critical methods from which these categories were largely absent (my emphasis).'[166] The methodologies adopted in this chapter were adopted to follow their adjurations and have proven central in examining how authorial subjectivity frequently surfaced heteronymically in Birmingham group writing. As Pamela Fox suggests, shame theorist '[Helen] Lynd had only to consult the working-

class fictional texts of the subsequent period to glimpse her theory worked out in narrative form'.[167] By placing authors and characters in dialogue with one another, the narratives of the Birmingham group writers both respond to and, at times anticipate, Lynd's theories.

Owing to their mis-identification as local exemplars of the wider, more militant variety of proletarian realist literature 'frequently untroubled by any substantive engagement with the actual texts or reflection on the term itself', the Birmingham group writers have suffered unwarranted oversight and neglect.[168] The recovery of their work is hardly begun, yet, taken as documents recording the 'complexities of working-class experience, which political, historical and sociological accounts often erase' their narratives function as both a record of working-class culture in the 1930s and provide a valuable resource for working-class culture now, where, as Nick Hubble suggests:

> Such a culture – because it includes everyday resistance, subjectivity and intersubjectivity, material desires and a challenge to traditional gender relations, and links them to an understanding of capitalist social relations – provides resources from which to build social relations for the radically changed conditions now emerging in the twenty-first century.[169]

Notes

[1] Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations*, Preface, p. ix.
[2] Paul Mason, *Postcapitalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2016), p. 177.
[3] Barbara Foley, 'Intersectionality: A Marxist Critique', *New Labor Forum*, 28.3. (2018) 10-13, p. 11. <doi: 10.1177/1095796019867944> [accessed 25-07-2020]
[4] Victor Wallis, 'Intersectionality's Binding Agent: The Political Primacy of Class'*, New Political Science*, 37. 4. (2015), 604-619. p. 610. <doi: 10.1080/07393148.2015.1089032> [accessed 21-10-2020]
[5] Nicola Wilson, *Home in British Working-Class Fiction*, p. 1.
[6] Peter Williams, 'Constituting Class and Gender: A Social History of the Home, 1700 – 1901', in Nigel Thrift and Peter Williams eds, *Class and Space: The Making of Urban Society,* (London, 1987), pp. 154-204, p. 154. In Nicola Wilson, *Home in British Working-Class Fiction,* p. 15.
[7] Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890 – 1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 4. In Wilson, *Home in British Working-Class Fiction,* p. 2.
[8] Nicola Wilson, Ibid*,* p.39.
[9] Ibid, p. 69.
[10] Alick West's aphorism 'When I do not know any longer who are the 'we' to whom I belong. I do not know any longer who 'I' am either', Alick West, *Crisis and Criticism & Literary Essays* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), p. 19. Cited in Nick Hubble, *The Proletarian Answer*. Introduction, p. 1.
[11] Ibid, p. 33.
[12] Stephen Reynolds 'Autobiografiction' in Max Saunders, *Self-Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, & the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 174.
[13] Stephen Reynolds. 'Autobiografiction', *Speaker*, New Series, 15, 366, (October 1906). In Max Saunders, *Self-Impression,* pp. 166-179.
[14] Ibid, p. 169.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid, p. 175.
[17] Ibid, pp. 172, 173.
[18] Nick Hubble, *The Proletarian Answer,* p. 18.
[19] Max Saunders, *Self-Impression*, p. 205, cited in Hubble, *The Proletarian Answer,* p. 18.
[20] George Orwell*, The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 104.
[21] Cyril Connolly, *Enemies of Promise* (London: Penguin Books, 1979) p. 127.
[22] Cunningham, *British Writers*, p. 152.
[23] Virginia Woolf cited in Cunningham, *British Writers,* pp. 151, 152.
[24] *Folios of New Writing,* Spring 1941, 'The Leaning Tower: Replies' comprised three articles: The Falling Tower, Below the Tower, The Tower that Once, written by Edward Upward, B.L. Coombes and Louis MacNeice respectively, with 'A Postscript' by John Lehmann defending the 'Leaning Tower' writers against Woolf's animadversions. pp. 42-46.
[25] Cunningham *British Writers*, p. 152
[26] John Fordham, *James Hanley: Modernism,* p. 130.
[27] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 313.
[28] Sarah Copland and Greta Olson, 'Towards a Politics of Form', *European Journal of English Studies,* 20 (2016). 207-221, p. 207.
[29] Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations*, pp. 284-398.
[30] Philip Gorski, introduction, p. viii. Walter Brierley, *Sandwichman* (London: Merlin Press, 1990).
[31] Graham Holderness, 'Miners and the Novel', in Jeremy Hawthorn Ed, *The British Working Class Novel,* p. 22.
[32] Walter Brierley, 'Body', in John Hackney, *No Want of Meat Sir!: Being a Collection of Stories Edited by John Hackney* (London: Grayson & Grayson, 1936), p. 517.
[33] Cunningham, *British Writers*, pp. 310, 311. Cf. Leslie Halward's Jim Belcher in the discussion of 'Belcher's Hod', qv, Chapter 1, p. 35. et seq.
[34] Flood, Michael, 'Toxic Masculinity: A Primer and Commentary, <XY Online. Net 2018> [accessed 07-07-2018]
[35] Ibid.
[36] An incident Brierley reworked as the cause of Arthur Gardner's dismissal in *Sandwichman.*
[37] Harold Heslop's *The Gate of a Strange Field* (1929) in Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions*, p. 83.
[38] Worker intellectuals as emblems of class agency: Frank Owen from Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, and Larry Meath from Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole,* Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions*, p. 79.
[39] Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life,* p. 298.
[40] Alick West, *Crisis and Criticism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), p. 19.
[41] Ralph Fox, *The Novel and the People* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1937), p. 34.
[42] Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers*, p. 219.

[43] Barbara Foley sees the reader's identification with the protagonists of proletarian fiction as a means of positioning the reader to undergo an education of their own, thereby experiencing an ideological effect very different from that accompanying the classic bildungsroman. Proletarian fictions 'posit the synecdochic relation of their protagonists to their social groups. But they speak for a collective, not an individual self'. *Radical Representations,* p. 284.
[44] Nick Hubble, *The Proletarian Answer*, p. 3.
[45] Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions,* p. 16.
[46] Richard Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy,* p. 64.
[47] The expression 'to relish the sublime' is from Matthew Arnold. *Culture and Anarchy.* Arnold cites these words from an obscure satire by John Arbuthnot a contemporary of Swift and Pope. p. 3. Ryle, Martin and Kate Soper *To Relish the Sublime*, p. 3.
[48] John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligensia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 19.
[49] Rachel Haworth, 'Abyss: Class and Culture in Howards End', *Cambridge Author's Project* (2009) <https://www.english.cam.ac.uk> [accessed 06-09-2019]
[50] Owen Jones, 'How To Be A Man: The Quiet Crisis of Masculinity', New Statesman, 7th June 2016. <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2016/06how-be-man> [accessed 16-09-2019].
[51] Nick Hubble, *The Proletarian Answer,* p. 47.
[52] Letter John Hampson to Walter Brierley. 12th Sept 1934. Walter Brierley Papers. DL282. Derby Local Studies Library and family services.
[53] Letter Walter Allen to Walter Brierley. 17th Sept 1934. Walter Brierley Papers. DL282. Derby Local Studies Library and family services.
[54] Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction*, pp. 65, 68.
[55] Max Saunders, 'Biography and Autobiography' in Marcus, Laura and Peter Nicholls, *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 301-302.
[56] Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction*, p. 68.
[57] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy,* p. 63.
[58] John Lucas, 'Walter Brierley & Leslie Williamson'. Home Up. p. 3. <https://www.pennilesspress.co.uk> [Accessed 22-1-2018].
[59] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy,* p. 27.
[60] This real life incident is similar to that described in Brierley's short-story 'Body'.
[61] Stephen Brooke, 'Gender and Working-Class Identity in Britain During the 1950s'*, Journal of Social History,* 773-95. p. 776.
[62] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 244.
[63] Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction,* p. 32.
[64] Carole Snee, 'Working Class Literature or Proletarian Writing' in Jon Clark and others, *Culture and Crisis*, p. 179.
[65] Nicola Wilson, *Home in British Working-Class Fiction,* p. 50.
[66] Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions,* pp. 25, 26.
[67] Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 98.
[68] Walter Brierley references Hardy's novel, Arthur describing it as 'not a very pleasant one' on returning home to find his mother reading it. *Sandwichman*, p. 213.
[69] Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days,* p. 84.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid, p. 85.
[72] Philip Gorski, Introduction, Walter Brierley, *Sandwichman,* p. xv.
[73] Carol Snee. 'Working-Class Literature or Proletarian Writing?' in Clark and Others. *Culture and Crisis,* p. 180.
[74] Carol Snee. Ibid. ; The WEA courses attended by both D.H. Lawrence and Walter Brierley had been devised on the principle of political neutrality and founded on the Arnoldian conception of literary culture. In this respect the WEA 'was – and has remained – an organisation *for* rather than *of* the working class'. Janet Batsleer and others, *Rewriting English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class* (London; Methuen & Co, 1985), p. 50.
[75] Noam Chomsky, *On Anarchism* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), p. 133.
[76] Carole Snee, 'Working-Class Literature or Proletarian Writing?' in Jon Clark, *Culture and Crisis,* p. 166.
[77] Macdonald Daly, 'D.H. Lawrence and Walter Brierley', *Journal of D. H. Lawrence Studies*, 4 (1986), p.28.
[78] D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 89. ; Macdonald Daly, 'D. H. Lawrence and Walter Brierley', *Journal of D. H. Lawrence Studies,* 4 (1986).
[79] Macdonald Daly, Ibid.
[80] Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction,* p. 68.
[81] Philip Gorski, introduction to Walter Brierley, *Sandwichman,* p. viii.
[82] Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working-Classes,* p. 277.
[83] Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction,* p. 69.

[84] Philip Gorski, introduction Walter Brierley, *Sandwichman*, p. xvi.
[85] Talk to Fircroft Working Men's College Birmingham. Halward Papers. MS1293/106/30. The Library of Birmingham.
[86] The Coming of Proletarian Literature: A Symposium, *London Mercury,* May 1936.
[87] Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction,* p. 65.
[88] Paul Lester, *The Road to Excelsior Lodge* (Birmingham: Protean Publications, 1988), p. 12.
[89] Cyril Connolly, in Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days*, pp. 168, 169.
[90] Leslie Halward, *Let Me Tell You,* p. 227.
[91] Walter Allen, *The Short Story in English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 275.
[92] Ibid, pp. 142, 143.
[93] Following the war and the failure to find a market for his short-stories, Halward turned to playwriting for radio (the BBC Home Service) in which he achieved some local notoriety to the extent that in the late 1950s *The Sunday Mercury* could remark that Halward 'had come to be known as 'the voice of the Midlands'. *Sunday Mercury,* 26th May 1957. Paul Lester, *The Road to Excelsior Lodge,* p. 18.
[94] Geoffrey Trease (11.8.1909 – 27.1.1998), A Midlands writer who lived near Leslie Halward in Colwall, Worcestershire.
[95] Walter Allen, *The Short Story In English,* p. 60.
[96] H. E. Bates, *The Modern Short Story*, p. 59.
[97] Graham Green employed the term 'entertainments' to distinguish between his thrillers and his 'Literary' works.
[98] Andy Croft, 'The Birmingham Group: Literary Life Between Two Wars', *London Magazine, 23* (1983), p. 20.
[99] Bashir Abu Manneh, *Fiction of the New Statesman*
[100] Ibid, 'Introduction: Realism and Class' p. xi.
[101] Ibid, p. 196.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Barbara Foley cited in Ronald Paul "'A Culture of the People": Politics and Working-Class Literature in Left Review, 1934-1938', *Left History*, 8. 1. (2002), 61-76. p. 72.
[104] Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers*, p. 303.
[105] Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction' in Lawrence Rainey, Modernism an Anthology (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 897.
[106] Leslie Halward, 'Writing about the Working-Class'. A talk given at Fircroft Workingmen's College Birmingham, 8th October 1939, Halward Papers. The Library of Birmingham, MS1293/106/30.
[107] Auden, W. H. and Edward Mendelson, ed, *The English Auden*, p. 355.
[108] Peter Chamberlain, W*hat The Sweet Hell?* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1935), p. 103.
[109] The story first appeared in the *New Statesman* (23rd February 1935), p. 245-6. Later collected in the anthology *What the Sweet Hell?* (USA: Henry Holt and Company, 1935).
[110] J. M. Coetzee, 'The Man Who went Shopping for The Truth', Review of Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* translated from the German and French by Howard Eiland and Kevin Mclaughlin.
[111] *New Statesman,* 12th November 1938. P. 777.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Nick Hubble, 'The Intermodern Assumption of the Future' in Kristen Bluemel, *Intermodernism,* p. 172. ; The reference to the 'Jakobsonian dominant' in Keith Williams 'Post/Modern Documentary: Orwell, Agee and the New Reportage' in Keith Williams and Stephen Matthews, *Rewriting the Thirties,* p. 164.
[114] Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream*, p. 182.
[115] Ibid, p. 183.
[116] Charles McGrath, 'The Eavesdropper's Secret: On John O'Hara', In *The New Yorker,* 22nd September 2016.
[117] Ibid.
[118] John Hampson, 'Movements in the Underground, II', John Lehmann Ed, The Penguin New Writing, No 28, (London: Penguin Books, 1946), p. 133.
[119] J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), pp. 418, 517.
[120] Max Saunders, *Self-Impression,* p. 171.
[121] Walter Allen, *As I Walked Down,* p. 68.
[122] The 'Yewgottabe Tough' school, coinage is attributed to Cyril Connolly's 'New Statesman' article, 1st February 1936. Connolly was referring to the British emulation of American novels e.g. *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and the enthusiasm for similar 'low-life' novels of underworld Britain: James Curtis' *The Gilt Kid* (1936), Robert Westerby's *Wide Boys Never Work,* (1937) and Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* (1938) to name but a few.
[123] Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days,* pp. 170, 171.
[124] Ibid, p. 194.
[125] Bashir Abu-Manneh, *Fiction of the New Statesman,* p. 193.

[126] Nicola Caramina, 'Self-Concept in Consumer Behaviour: A Psychoanalytical Investigation Working Paper Series'. (2018) <https://www.academia.edi/36927375/Self-Concept-in-Consumer-Behaviour>. p. 67.
[127] Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions,* p. 26.
[128] Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents*, p. 121.
[129] Stanislava Dikova, 'Book Review: The Proletarian Answer to the Modernist Question by Nick Hubble ', (2018) <Https://Lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks.> [accessed 22.4.2019]. Unpaginated.
[130] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 205.
[131] Mercer Hampson Simpson, 'The Novels of John Hampson', (Master of Arts, 1975). M.A. Dissertation. University of South Wales Library Services. p.54.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Following considerable research the American Psychological Association removed homosexuality from the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical manual of Sexual Disorders) thus removing the stigma of mental illness that had long been associated with it. However, it was not until as recently as 1987 that homosexuality would completely fall from the DSM.
[134] Mercer Hampson Simpson, 'The Novels of John Hampson', p. 51.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream,* pp. 226, 227.
[137] William Plomer cited in Christopher Hawtree Introduction, p. iv. John Hampson, *Saturday Night at the Greyhound* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1986).
[138] Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents,* p. 121.
[139] Ibid, p. 22.
[140] 'The Greyhound' in Grovelace was based upon 'The Kettle Inn' in Ashover, Derbyshire where Hampson had worked 'in part protection' of his beloved sister Mona.
[141] The Crown & Cushion, Perry Barr, Birmingham was, until its recent demolition, a well-known Birmingham public house.
[142] This element of the story derives from Hampson's own experience as a barman and 'part-protect[or]'in helping his beloved sister Mona, represented pseudonymously as (Ivy Flack in *Saturday Night*) and (Mercy in *O Providence)* run a public house in the North Derbyshire mining village of Ashover. Christopher Hawtree introduction p. ii. John Hampson, *Saturday Night at the Greyhound.* As Hawtree points out, the same pub (The Nettle Inn) also figured unnamed in the first of three volumes of Graham Greene's autobiography, *A Sort of Life.* (1971).
[143] William Plomer introduction to the 1950 reprint of *Saturday Night at the Greyhound.* cited in Mercer Hampson Simpson. 'The Novels of John Hampson.' M. A. Dissertation, University of Wales, p. 48.
[144] Ibid, p. 39.
[145] The first attributed to Aristotle, is often employed by theatre critics to show how a character's actions, 'what they do', rather than 'what they say' determine their personality/fate. The second is attributed to Heraclitus. *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 12, p. 333.
[146] Christopher Hawtree, Introduction John Hampson *Saturday Night at the Greyhound,* p. 4.
[147] Ibid. Writing to Cape his publishers denigrating [*Saturday Night at the Greyhound*] Hampson asserted that he was 'not interested in it'. 'The characters lack resistance to providence. For that reason I feel half-hearted about them.' Letter 20th Dec 1929, cf. also letter to Leonard Woolf [Hogarth Press] 8th June 1930. Footnote 1, p. 18. p. 40. Mercer Hampson Simpson, M.A. Dissertation, 'The Novels of John Hampson'.
[148] Mercer F. Hampson Simpson following his reference to a passage from Havelock Ellis *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1901), 1915, based upon Havelock Ellis' reading of Freud's 'Some Neurotic mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia and Homosexuality', (1922), The Complete Psychological Works' (1957), 1973, xviii. Though questionable today, such theories were still current when Mercer F. Hampson Simpson referenced them. Mercer F. Hampson Simpson. 'The Novels of John Hampson', p. 12.
[149] Karim G. Dajani, 'Cultural Dislocation and Ego Functions: Some Considerations in the Analysis of Bi-Cultural Patients', *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies,* 15 (2018). p.186.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Karim G. Dajani, 'Cultural Dislocation', p. 186.
[152] Leslie Halward, Letter to MHS 23rd July 1974. In Mercer Hampson Simpson. 'The Novels of John Hampson.' Footnote i. p. 22.
[153] Nick Hubble, *The Proletarian Answer*, p. 4
[154] Ibid, p.14.
[155] Nick Hubble, *The Proletarian Answer,* p. 7.
[156] Mercer Hampson Simpson, 'The Novels of John Hampson', p. 46.
[157] Ibid, p. 48.
[158] Elizabeth Maslen, 'A Cassandra With Clout: Storm Jameson Little Englander And Good European', in Kristen Bluemel, *Intermodernism*, 21-37. p. 27.
[159] Williams, Keith and Stephen Matthews, *Rewriting the Thirties*, pp. 164, 165.

[160] Lara Feigal, 'Buggery and Montage: Birmingham and Bloomsbury in the 1930s' in Anna Burrells and others *Woolfian Boundaries* (South Carolina: Clemson University, 2007), p. 55.
[161] Mercer Hampson Simpson. 'The Novels of John Hampson', p. 39.
[162] John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 21. Carey provides several other examples.
[163] Andy Croft, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Entry for Simpson, John, Frederick Norman Hampson [Known as John Hampson] (1901 – 1955), p. 2.
[164] Frank O'Connor, 'The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short-Story' in *Short-Story Theories*, ed, Charles May (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1963), p. 86.
[165] Jonathan Freedland, 'The 1930s were humanity's darkest, bloodiest hour. Are you paying attention?' *The Guardian*, Saturday 11th March , 2017.
[166] Clarke, Ben and Nick Hubble, *Working-Class Writing,* p. 5.
[167] Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions*, p. 203.
[168] Ben Clarke, Review of 'Nick Hubble, The Proletarian Answer to the Modernist Question', University of North Carolina, Greensboro, (2017) ,https://academic.oup,com/res/article-abstract/69/291/811/4980910> [accessed 15-11-2019]
[169] Nick Hubble, *The Proletarian Answer,* p. 40.

Conclusion

> During the past few years the attentive reader who scanned the English literary scene might have noticed that a new group of writers was emerging in the Midlands, chiefly in and near Birmingham. These writers, who lay no claim to a common purpose, and whose work developed spontaneously without any close common association, have nevertheless a good deal in common, and it was my pleasure as one of the editors of "New Stories" to discover in them this natural community of achievement when they first submitted stories to that magazine. John Hampson and Walter Brierley have already made a definite position for themselves with their novels, and Peter Chamberlain has won deserved recognition for his collection of short stories. Walter Allen is one of the group and not the least distinguished, but from the beginning it has seemed to me that Leslie Halward…[1]

Leslie Halward cited these lines in his autobiography *Let Me Tell You* (1938). Originally forming the opening paragraph of Edward O'Brien's introduction to his first collected volume of short stories *To Tea on Sunday* (1936), it was possibly modesty that prevented Halward from continuing, for O'Brien made further reference to his stories, praising him as the 'most gifted potentially' and his 'achievement […] so far the most substantial' of the Birmingham group writers. However, in characteristic manner, Halward had followed the ellipsis with which he ended the above extract by confiding: 'NOW LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT THE "Birmingham Group," [sic] which, alas, exists no longer'

> The almost weekly meetings no longer take place in the upper room of a public house off Corporation Street. Allen and Chamberlain have both gone to live in London; I am here in Malvern; only Hampson remains near the city. (Brierley should never have been included, for he lives in Derbyshire and has entered the public-house only once or twice when on a visit).[2]

Despite the dismissive tone in his reference to Brierley, Halward's words ought not distract from the tinge of regret in his 'eulogy'. While figures such as W. H. Auden philosophised from afar as the decade's 'clever hopes expire[d]', the advent of war had immediate consequences in Britain as preparations for it began to impinge upon everyday life. Though career opportunities prompted Walter Allen and Peter Chamberlain (always the Londoner at heart), to move to the capital, effectively signalling the end of the Birmingham group, the prospect of hostilities cemented its demise; the remaining members registering for active service or dispersing to their homes and

families. Walter Allen described the months between the Munich agreement and the outbreak of war as 'a period of waiting, as though life and significance were in suspense'.[3] Following Allen's move to London on the strength of Michael Joseph's £25 advance for *Innocence Is Drowned,* he found lodgings in the capital and, by securing reviewing work and reading film scripts for MGM, provided himself with a modicum of financial security which enabled the severing of his links with Birmingham and tentatively established him as a writer in the capital.[4]

Of the Birmingham group writers, it was Allen alone who, as one of the last 'Man of Letters' style literary critics, managed to extend his literary career beyond 1945. A literary education, combined with the skills learned from journalism, reviewing and lecturing, equipped him with a career portfolio ripe for adaption and fine tuning beyond the war years. *All In A Lifetime* (1959) an autobiografictional account of his father's life constituted his most successful (in terms of sales) novel, while his formal autobiography *As I Walked Down New Grub Street* (1981) and two important works of popular criticism offered a useful overview of the nation's literary firmament from the closing years of the Victorian period up to the outbreak of the Second World war, and have proven themselves valuable reference resources for this thesis. [5] Yet, despite having successfully negotiated the hazards of 'New Grub Street' even Walter Allen is barely considered today, if remembered at all, it is as a critic, reviewer, or literary editor of the *New Statesman,* than as a novelist; the literary fortunes of his Birmingham group contemporaries were still less assured.

Married in 1936, Halward and his wife Gwen moved from Birmingham to a cottage they named *O Providence* (after Hampson's novel) in the village of Guarlford near Malvern, Worcestershire. As Halward confidently recorded in the closing lines of his autobiography, 'Yes, we have got what we have so long waited for – each other and our cottage in the country. And let me tell you, we are very happy.'[6] Yet, on his return to civilian life following war service in the RAF, Halward, as recounted in his radio play 'Afternoon at Excelsior Lodge', was unable to pick up his literary ambitions from where he left them, having effectively cut himself off from the city and his roots in the urban experience he described so knowledgeably. As Walter Allen suggested, '[t]he working-class stories that he continued to write seemed like carbon copies of his Thirties stories'. He was, I think, the victim of his own lack of education and adaptability, and of the lack of imagination of bodies like the BBC that failed to exploit his talents.'[7]

On January 1st 1935 Walter Brierley received a letter of acceptance from Methuen agreeing to publish *Means Test Man.* and on the same day stepped from the privations of unemployment to take up work as a time-keeper at an engineering works in Derby. Possibly as a result of his studies he would later secure an appointment as a Child Welfare Officer in Derby, a position in which he would remaine until his retirement in 1965.[8] The success of *Means Test Man*

was not to be repeated however, beyond the novels *Sandwichman* (1937)*, Dalby Green* (1939), and *Danny* (1940) and a handful of short stories, Brierley was unable to get any further work published.[9]

Suffering narcolepsy and, according to Walter Allen, having successfully hidden it from the Army medical corps during his initial examination and throughout the war, Peter Chamberlain fulfilled his ambition to become a motor cycling instructor and attained the rank of sergeant. Unfortunately, more detailed biographical information remains elusive, though it appears that, following hostilities, Chamberlain returned to civilian life where, although no longer producing prose narratives (no evidence to the contrary has come to light), he remained in post as editor of *Motor Cyclist* until the early nineteen-fifties. Having tried to enlist, but being rejected on health grounds, in the RAF during the War years, John Hampson's health continued to deteriorate. A further novel, *A Bag of Stones,* was published in 1952, but cumulative critical neglect found his reputation in decline. Following a further illness and failed attempt to discharge himself from care, Hampson died in Solihull General Hospital on the 26th December 1955.

Short-lived as it had been, in addressing hitherto neglected aspects of working-class experience and simultaneously exploring the implications of their own lives as source material for their narratives, the Birmingham group writers 'constituted', what Edward O'Brien termed 'a natural community of achievement.'[10] Neither propagandistic nor quietist, the liminal space their narratives occupied is not to be construed as 'fence-sitting', on the contrary, they illustrate the quality of what the American literary theorist and critic Kenneth Burke named 'Addressedness', a variety of rhetorical stance identifying an author's ideological allegiance *to* or alignment *with* a specific audience and/or socio-political perspective without being overtly propagandistic or hortatory. Believing that 'addressedness' was politically neutral and applicable to either working-class or bourgeois writing, Burke saw that proletarian literature was addressed *to* the people *for* the people.[11] It is therefore to reiterate how, despite their experiential diversity, the writing of the Birmingham group remained ideologically radical, that the remainder of this conclusion will dwell. As critics Barbara Foley and Michael Denning argue in their respective recoveries of American worker writers from this period, the political impetus of working-class narratives was just as likely to be located in the individual writer's subjective experience and formal innovations than in an overtly political or propagandist content.

In their formal diversity and stylistic variety, Birmingham group narratives describe how things were for the citizens of Britain's second city in the chaotic years between the Wall Street crash and the build-up to the Second World War. For too long neglected or dismissed as 'guilty by association' with working-class literary productions that merely adopted traditional realist

modes or paid blind obeisance to ideological strictures as to what *ought* constitute the working-class novel, the writers of Birmingham supply fulsome testimony to that brief period in the thirties when, as Andy Croft observes:

> For a few years the Left seems to have genuinely understood how culture works, how impossible it is to legislate for the imagination, how different books can come to life in such different people's heads, how the unlikeliest of texts can make the heart beat faster in the unlikeliest of readers, how most of us win our ideas about ourselves, others, our society, about the possibilities of being human in our time from the culture we inhabit.[12]

This thesis has urged that, rather than sacrificing literary expression to propagandist rhetoric or in adopting traditional realist or naturalistic modes due to a limited awareness of any alternative representational strategy, the members of the Birmingham group were fully alive to prevailing cultural developments, in particular those deriving from what came to be termed the 'ethnographic turn' and they responded by readily employing aspects of the 'documentary dominant' in their narrative representations. Walter Allen adopted the Eisensteinian shock-montage effects and Griersonian 'exposure' strategies learned from the Birmingham Film Society and applied these to literary narratives that interrogated the injustices of the prevailing social order. *Innocence Is Drowned* adopted cinematic montage techniques in order to present an ideology critique which, to use Orwellian terminology, 'laid bare' the gulf between common perception and ideological reality. Rather than deploying overtly propagandist rhetoric, Allen contrived that his political message should emerge naturally from the events or situation described. This was achieved formally via the juxtaposition of contrasting images and alternating focalisations or vantage points so as to provide a dialectical montage directed to stirring the reader's political consciousness. As discussed, a degree of curatorial consternation regarding the de-politicising, fantasy-inducing effects of the media and mass entertainment was very much abroad during the 1930s. Commercial (Hollywood) cinema was considered a particularly negative influence, merely 'an ideological force to dope the workers.'[13] In *Blind Man's Ditch* Allen followed Henry Green's example. Adopting a cinematic grammar, he turned the techniques of commercial cinema in upon themselves to shake individuals from their complacency by presenting a 'montage of quickly changing scenes, from differing points of view, to juxtapose the life and thoughts of the upper- and working-class characters and show the perspective of each upon the other.'[14]

As Robert Scholes explains, '[Montage] has been claimed as the key device for modernism in the verbal as well as the visual arts', having been bestowed with 'special meanings' by Sergei Eisenstein. Scholes holds the word retains 'permanent currency in discussions not only

of film but of modernism in all the arts, if not modernity itself'.[15] That Walter Allen adapted its repertoire of effects is not to privilege modernism as the formal desideratum of working-class fiction *tout court,* but merely to indicate how Birmingham group writers accessed and adapted prevailing representational modes and thus repudiated the charge of 'expressive conservatism' levelled at working-class literature. Rather than merely re-configuring the traditional novel to accommodate a more politically-charged content, Allen's narratives adapted formal devices he discovered in the late modernist/Neo-Realist novels of Henry Green and applied these to works that look forward to the work of such post-war surveyors of Birmingham and the de-industrialised Midlands as David Lodge and Jonathan Coe.[16]

Walter Brierley likewise pushed beyond traditional realist or naturalistic conventions. *Means Test Man* employed irresolution: a cyclical, rather than linear, plot design resistant to closure; psychological analysis more in tune with modernist interiority, some might claim solipsistic affectation (though Brierley's protagonists psychological pre-occupations could hardly be considered affectations), and, owing to its often parodic and frequently ironic use of language and imagery: satire, which, in shaping a 'neo-realist' mode, achieved a kind of grotesquery at times more redolent of expressionism, than traditional realist or naturalist representational modes.[17] Again, though not achieving the polemics sought by Gustav H. Klaus, by combining these devices Brierley nevertheless *umfunktionert* (functionally re-orientated), the traditional realist mode. In *Sandwichman*, Brierley proceeded to transform the traditional bildungsroman. He did this in two ways: firstly, by inverting the arc of traditional realist novel's trajectory and the individual's growth from ignorance to maturation, and secondly, by interrogating the idea of the liberal education itself, by referencing the obstacles facing a working-class individual pursuing self-cultivation via academic means. Rather than achieving or affirming his protagonist's desires, Brierley shows the tragic consequences of the attempt while simultaneously addressing contemporary themes of masculinity, the family breadwinner convention, the position of women in contemporary society and, not least, his own authorial identity. As with John Hampson it is doubtful whether Brierley would have been familiar with the term, but through innovation and experimentation he inadvertently stumbled upon a hybrid form that was strangely reminiscent of Stephen Reynold's autobiografiction.

Peter Chamberlain's writing problematised the discussion. Like Henry Green, he was an outsider who wrote *about* and often from the perspective *of* the working-class, rather than as an insider *looking in*. While editor of *Motor Cycle* magazine, owing to his acquaintance with Hampson's brother Jimmy a famous racing motor-cyclist, he arrived in Birmingham met John Hampson and subsequently joined the Birmingham coterie. A practising and published writer beyond his

editorial role at *Motor Cycle,* Chamberlain followed in the footsteps of those who came over to the working-classes following Comintern's shift to popular front policies in 1935, where, as Barbara Foley reminds us, 'the task of writers was now to be seen as mimetic rather than hortatory […] writers should not engage in agitational polemics that would disrupt realism's illusion of seamless transparency: the objective portrayal of existing realities was adequate testimony to socialist partisanship'.[18] Chamberlain's working-class *tranche de vie* certainly provided objective portrayals of proletarian existence, while the 'portraits' that constituted his 'suburban exercises' provided surreal 'out of context' micro-images of the middle-class world he knew so intimately. By adapting the 'image-driven' style of the photo-essay, injecting elements of comedy and providing insider-perspectives of his own milieu, he articulated leftist theorist Edward Seaver's claim that 'the compelling factor in a writer's work' derives not from 'the class origin of the writer […] but his present class alignment, not the period in history, or the characters that he writes about, but his ideological approach to his story and characters.'[19]

Although Leslie Halward may have appreciated, possibly encouraged the description of his work as proletarian naturalism, it was he of the five Birmingham group writers who came closest to Raymond Williams definition of the working-class writer as 'a working-class adult who writes a novel, rather than 'the *writer* who comes from a working-class family and community.'[20] Consideration of his writing as anything but a purely objective attempt to capture the realities of proletarian existence would have been anathema to Halward. Modelling his style and early stories on Chekhov, Halward early assumed his vocation: in the face of bourgeois snobbery, he believed proletarian experience was worth writing about and to this extent he acted as a spokesman for his class. Simply in being written his narratives present as a cultural intervention and challenge to the established literary canon, yet his 'English' naturalism was more than this. As Walter Allen observed, though 'just as likely to vote Tory as Labour', Halward nonetheless remained a champion of working-class cultural mores and wrote with perspicacity and psychological insight. Whether the doubly-oppressed woman as housekeeper, wife or carer, the awkward apprentice, the ageing tradesman, the spiv, the drunkard, or the courting or newly-married couples who peopled his narratives, he brought the voiceless citizens of his native city to popular attention, his well-tuned ear prompting E. M. Forster to proclaim him the one working-class writer who made 'the working-class come alive for him.'[21]

Copies of *Saturday Night at The Greyhound* are easily found, yet, in terms of critical neglect John Hampson has suffered a fate similar to his Birmingham group contemporaries. However, to use an overworked expression, his work still retains *relevance* today. Coming from a middle-class family fallen on hard times, ill-health militated against his receiving any formal education. On

leaving, more possibly estranged from home at an early age in order to escape the domestic turbulence attendant on families living near the breadline, he worked variously as kitchen-hand, barman, waiter along with other ancillary occupations. Reduced circumstances equipped him with a knowledge of the poorly paid hospitality sector and this, combined with a natural sensitivity and emotional intelligence, enabled him to create characters and representations of intersubjective experience at both cross- and intra-class levels. Never overtly political, his authorial perspective bespeaks an innate *moral* sensibility. Aware that this distinction is contested, I enlist the following remarks of the American writer and literary critic Alfred Kazin. No lover of politically progressive or propagandist literature himself, Kazin nevertheless excoriated a post-war critic who scorned the thirties as 'an imbecile decade' and who, as Kazin relates, '[continued to] explain – with the usual assurance of people who have more than enough to eat – that the issues in literature are 'not political but moral'.'[22] Kazin rounded on this reviewer, asserting that '[a]nyone who thinks *political* and *moral* are unrelated is certainly living in a world very different from the thirties – or the 1990s' [I would want to add the 2020s].[23] Simply put, of the five Birmingham group writers, Hampson's world view is in many ways the most prescient of twenty-first century concerns, especially in its disengagement with traditional sectarian imperatives, towards a position resembling more closely contemporary identity politics. Hampson's narratives reveal how intersections of class, place, sexuality and gender oppression function by making their implications and consequences explicit in his narratives. In this respect his work was not only pre-figurative of phallocentrist discussion taken up years later by Jacques Derrida, Kate Millett, Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick but also that surrounding the 'post-scarcity emotional economy' and kind of society envisaged by Paul Mason and Nick Hubble in which 'there is no inherent conflict between individual self-realisation and group welfare if the type of society is one which is capable of giving self-expression to, and support for, a diverse range of identities and relationships'.[24] Employing a restricted linguistic palette and bedrock style possibly owing more to Dashiel Hammett than Hemingway, John Hampson, as with Walter Allen, adopted modernist techniques such as irresolution, filmic devices such as montage and the social/collective potential of an autobiografictional genre in order to frame the range of differing social groupings, regional conventions and social status within a purportedly monolithic working-class.

In the course of my research, this close-reading of the Birmingham group narratives has enabled me to move from the perplexity expressed at the outset of the introductory chapter to discover that, contrary to the pre popular-front critique which considered the lack of an overtly sectarian or propagandist message a weakness, the restraint: the conspicuous absence of political rhetoric exercised by the Birmingham writers functions paradoxically as a more powerful political

device. Emerging naturally from the quotidian experience of working-class life addressed in the 'content' of their novels and short-stories, the Birmingham writers, rather than expressively conservative, instead adopted formal strategies that were intrinsically radical. By recourse to a range of stylistic devices, they were able to reinstate the 'literary' at the forefront of their narrative endeavours. Whether employing modernist experimentation, or reconfiguring traditional novelistic modes to articulate their political ideology, the works of the Birmingham group writers present themselves as both prescient of, and responsive to, a politics of form. Pressing beyond the purely narratological, Greta Olsen and Sarah Copland cite amongst others Chantal Mouffe and Fredric Jameson to urge 'the necessity of reading not only aesthetic forms but also modes of interpretation in politically acute ways.'[25]

This has significant implications not only for the continuing theorisation, critical practice and further research of working-class writing, but also the direction of English studies in general. In bringing the moral, political and literary into orbit with one another, rather than being assimilated or viewed as a sub-category of a larger 'English Literature', 'Working-class writing' as Ben Clarke and Nick Hubble maintain, 'is essential […] because it insists upon the specificity of working-class experience, which political, historical and sociological accounts often erase.'[26] By bringing the experience of working-people into the literary canon, the literary 'artefact' enables a fuller and more detailed consideration of the culture from which it is drawn. In this respect, the Birmingham group novels and short-stories foster not only an awareness but also a greater critical attention to issues of class and the working-class in particular which 'extends both the methods and objects of literary studies' thereby situating English Literature as the sun around which the related humanities discourses of cultural studies, history and philosophy revolve.[27] The qualitative research undertaken by the historians E. P. Thompson, Lawrence Stone and, more recently, Joanna Bourke, who drew upon working-class womens' autobiography, each testify to their faith in the (qualitative) *literary* evidence found in narrative accounts rather than purely *statistical* (quantitative) evidence and would therefore appear to support this view.

The impetus for this thesis stemmed in part from the tacit encouragement provided by the reprinting and re-issue of working-class novels inaugurated by Andy Croft and Philip Gorski. Their recovery of Walter Brierley stimulated my aim to explore and recover the work of the remaining, and in my opinion equally overlooked, members of the Birmingham group. I would hope the value of this thesis lies in its having provided the footings for further exploration and may follow Croft et al in precipitating the re-printing of other works from this much neglected body of working-class writing. Although the Hogarth Press reprints of Allen's *All In A Lifetime* and Hampson's *Saturday Night At The Greyhound* remain available, a significant number of their

other novels, not to mention the collected short-stories of Leslie Halward and Peter Chamberlain remain currently out of print and are either prohibitively expensive or difficult to access.

Though briefly arrested between 1939 and 1945, Britain's transformation from manufacturing to service-based economy had begun prior to the War years and though Birmingham undoubtedly played an important role in the collective War effort, the high levels of employment necessitated by arms manufacture only provided a brief hiatus in the city's slow but inexorable industrial decline. If it had been assumed that, following the war, things would simply 'return to normal' and that the literary status quo would merely 'pick up from where it had left off', such hopes were unfortunately misbegotten. Walter Allen commented upon the disappearance of the magazines that had published Leslie Halward's stories and the simple fact that after the War his kind of writing was no longer fashionable. Halward raised similar concerns himself, in his drama 'Afternoon at Excelsior Lodge' (1960) the protagonist, an impoverished, no-longer read and somewhat cynical, working-class writer, reflects on the 'bygone world [of the thirties] which the workers, in their new affluence, preferred to forget'. The play's central character Finsbury (Halward) laments there is no longer a working-class he can recognise although he speculates gloomily, perhaps prophetically that '[t]here will be in a few years the way things are going. Then I might be able to start again'.[28] Lara Feigel remarks how 'the postwar climate ushered in a new political climate in which political commitment was no longer simple and not necessarily even desirable':[29]

> The Literary tradition of self-consciously cinematic, politically engaged literature that began in the early 1930s and flourished at the end of the decade was brought to an abrupt halt by the end of the war. […] Writers such as Sommerfield, Greenwood or Allen never again regained the popularity they had enjoyed in the 1930s, and left-wing tendencies were no longer prerequisites for acceptance in the literary world.[30]

Feigel records 'the writers who had so violently committed themselves both to left-wing politics and to cinema tended to withdraw from both.' Henry Green and Walter Allen each abandoned the use of montage effects and as Feigel points out by the end of the decade 'cinematic technique had become endemic in the novel but was rarely used overtly with a political purpose.'[31] Whether attributable solely to changes in individual belief as with the refutations of Auden or Lehmann, or changes in literary 'fashion' alone is arguable, however, the 'new political climate' Feigel references above was certainly registered in the post-war consensus. Effectively constituting a reversal of what Fredric Jameson terms 'expressive causality', the socio-political changes

registered here reflected negatively on working-class literary production.[32] Ian Haywood speculates that 'if ever a day can be chosen as a turning point in British working-class history, 26th July 1945 must be a prime candidate'.[33] The tranche of reforms: 'full employment based upon Keynsian economics; nationalisation of the staple industries; the creation of a welfare state, a National Health Service; universal free education; and state patronage of the arts each enacted on this day effectively saw Beveridge's 'Five Giants' banished in one fell swoop'.[34] Cementing Lara Feigel's claim that political commitment was 'no longer simple and not necessarily desirable', the social reforms constituting what has come to be termed the 'post-war consensus' served – at least for the time being - to render the cultural intervention of working-class writers redundant.

For a brief period in the troubled decade leading up to the outbreak of war, the Birmingham group faithfully chronicled the lives of their fellow citizens in their travails against the deprivations wrought upon them by pre-war inequalities.[35] Despite Auden's claim that 'poetry makes nothing happen' the Birmingham group writers rose to the occasion, whether their work moved politicians to make the necessary reforms is unknown, though to paraphrase Andy Croft, for a few years during the 1930s they seem to have genuinely understood how a culture worked, in so doing they communicated to a wider readership the experience of the second city's working-classes for too long overlooked. In the closing lines of his introduction and, in what seems a fitting close to this thesis, Edward O'Brien remarked how Halward – and by implication the other Birmingham group writers – successfully broke with the inhibitions that hindered others from making social contact beyond their class confines. O'Brien was adamant such barriers did not exist for the Birmingham group writers, 'When they write about life, they accept life and life accepts them. Each accepts the other on his own terms and is content with what he finds'. In short they have learned that 'Life is never in bad taste. Once that discovery has been made by a writer his art will not be in bad taste. Life is earthy and salty also and it wears old clothes. And life accepts everybody and everything for what they are.'[36]

Notes

[1] Edward O'Brien. Introduction p. vii. Leslie Halward, *To Tea on Sunday,* cited in Halward's autobiography *Let Me Tell You*. p. 244.
[2] Leslie Halward, *Let Me Tell You,* pp. 244, 245.
[3] Walter Allen, *As I Walked*, p. 114.
[4] Ibid, p. 96.
[5] Walter Allen's *The English Novel: A Short Critical History* (1954) and *Tradition and Dream: The English and American Novel from the Twenties to Our Time* (1964), possibly represent the swansong of traditional English literary criticism prior to the upsurge of feminist, colonial, and cultural–materialist critiques which came to dominate critical discussion from the late nineteen-sixties onwards. *Tradition and Dream* represents a pioneering attempt by an English critic to provide an overview of contemporary American literature.
[6] Leslie Halward, *Let Me Tell You*, p. 288.
[7] Walter Allen, *As I Walked*, p. 70.
[8] Andy Croft Introduction, Walter Brierley, *Means Test Man*, p. xii.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Edward O'Brien. Introduction, p. vii. Leslie Halward, *To Tea on Sunday*.
[11] Kenneth Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, 1969).
[12] Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days*, p. 9.
[13] Lara Feigel, *Literature, Cinema and Politics*, p. 118.
[14] Ibid, p. 136.
[15] Robert Scholes, *Paradox of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 96, 97.
[16] Cf. David Lodge's *Nice Work* (1988) for its montaged exploration of conflicting political ideologies, and also Jonathan Coe's *Middle-England* (2018), pp. 255-263, for its use of similar devices to examine the processes of de-industrialisation (The closure of the Longbridge car plant in Birmingham).
[17] Jack Windle explains Bakhtin asserted 'the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is to transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body'. In Clarke, Ben and Nick Hubble, *Working-Class Writing*, 41-60. p. 51.
[18] Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations*, pp. 162, 163.
[19] Edward Seaver, cited in Barbara Foley, ibid, p. 119.
[20] Raymond Williams. 'Working-Class, Proletarian, Socialist: Problems in Some Welsh Novels', in H. Gustav Klaus, *The Socialist Novel in Britain*, p. 114.
[21] Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days,* p. 169.
[22] Alfred Kazin, introduction, p. vii, Henry Roth, *Call It Sleep* (London: Penguin Books, 2006).
[23] Ibid.
[24] Nick Hubble, *The Proletarian Answer*, p. 20.
[25] Copland, Sarah and Greta Olsen, 'A Politics of Form', *European Journal of English Studies*, 20. (2016), 207-221, p. 212.
[26] Ben Clarke and Nick Hubble, Introduction, *Working-Class Writing,* p. 5.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Paul Lester, *The Road To Excelsior Lodge,* p. 21.
[29] Lara Feigel, *Literature, Cinema and Politics,* p. 235.
[30] Ibid, p. 233.
[31] Ibid, p. 235.
[32] Fredric Jameson*, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a socially symbolic act,* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 10.
[33] Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction,* p. 88.
[34] Ibid, p. 89.
[35] The Beveridge Report identified Want, Disease, Squalor, Ignorance and Idleness as the 'Five Giants' constituting the social deprivation needing to be addressed by the post-war consensus registered in the Labour Party's 1945 General Election victory.
[36] Edward J. O'Brien, introduction, p. x. Leslie Halward, *To Tea on Sunday.*

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