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**Social Reality and Narrative Form  
in the Fiction of Henry Green**

**by**

**Marius Hentea**

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### Declaration

I declare that the thesis which follows is my independent work and none of it has been submitted for a degree at another university.

Some portions of the thesis are in print or awaiting publication: ‘Fictional Doubles in Henry Green’s *Back*’, *Review of English Studies*, 61.251 (September 2010), 614-26; ‘Fictions of Class and Community in Henry Green’s *Living*’, *Studies in the Novel*, 42 (2010), 321-39; ‘The Forms and Functions of Back Story in the Novel’, *Narrative*, 18 (2010), 347-66; and ‘Late Modernist Debuts: Publishing and

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## Abstract

*Social Reality and Narrative Form in the Fiction of Henry Green* contests the dominant reading of Henry Green's fiction as an abstract, autonomous textual production. My thesis situates Green into a number of literary and socio-historical contexts and argues that doing so challenges a number of prevailing critical orthodoxies. I also argue that Green's fiction is formally constructed through a variety of dislocations, from displacing the centrality of plot, undermining the integrity of character, silencing the narrative voice and questioning the authenticity of the self. To relate social reality to narrative form, each of the four main chapters is dedicated to one of four substantive aspects of material reality: age, class, geography and the body. In the first chapter, I examine Green's relationship to the writing of his generation and to the concepts of age and youth. I argue that Green was deeply ambivalent towards generational belonging or the notion that identity could be supplied through one's generation. My second chapter investigates Green's treatment of social class and positions his Birmingham factory novel, *Living*, against 1930s theories of proletarian fiction and its canonical texts. My third chapter considers sites of authority both in the external world (geographic space) as well as within the novelistic space. The eclipsing of the narrator and the subsequent translation of the imaginative faculty to the reader is a part of Green's strategy to displace sites of authority. My final chapter looks at Green's treatment of the physical body and argues that disability is a central aspect of his novelistic practice. The impossibility of unity and wholeness, therefore, sheds light not only on the physicality of modern man but also on wholeness as a mental and linguistic possibility when the times are 'breaking up.'

## Abbreviations

<i>CWGO</i>	<i>Complete Works of George Orwell</i>
<i>GOCH</i>	<i>George Orwell: The Critical Heritage</i>
<i>Letters EW</i>	<i>Letters of Evelyn Waugh</i>
<i>LOD</i>	<i>Love on the Dole</i>
<i>O.C.</i>	Jean-Jacques Rousseau, <i>Œuvres Complètes</i>
<i>PCBR</i>	<i>Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record</i>
<i>PMB</i>	<i>Pack My Bag</i>
<i>PW</i>	<i>Publishers' Weekly</i>
<i>RWP</i>	<i>The Road to Wigan Pier</i>
<i>TLS</i>	<i>Times Literary Supplement</i>
<i>TRTP</i>	<i>The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists</i>

### Works by Henry Green

- Blindness*, in *Nothing Doting Blindness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993 [1926]), pp. 339-504
- Back* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1946)
- Caught* (London: Harvill Press, 2001 [1943])
- Concluding* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964 [1948])
- Doting*, in *Nothing Doting Blindness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993 [1952]), pp. 169-337
- Living*, in *Loving Living Party Going* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993 [1929]), pp. 205-382
- Loving*, in *Loving Living Party Going* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993 [1948]), pp. 17-204
- Nothing*, in *Nothing Doting Blindness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993 [1950]), pp. 7-168
- Pack My Bag* (New York: New Directions, 2004 [1940])
- Party Going*, in *Loving Living Party Going* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993 [1948]), pp. 383-528
- Surviving: The Uncollected Writings of Henry Green*, ed. by Matthew Yorke (New York: Viking, 1993 [1992])

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Almost every study of the fiction of Henry Green, the pen name of the British author and industrialist Henry Vincent Yorke (1905-1973), foregrounds its ‘oblique’ and ‘elusive’ nature. Edward Stokes calls him ‘one of the most elusive, tantalizing and enigmatic of novelists’; Oddvar Holmesland calls his fiction ‘oblique’ while Patrick Swinden chooses ‘unusual’ and ‘enigmatic’; for Michael Gorra, Green is ‘the most elusive writer of his generation’; and, more recently, Patrick MacDermott has spoken of Green’s ‘oblique approach to novel writing.’<sup>1</sup> These terms are repeated throughout Green criticism, but it is not difficulty that is stressed. Countless undergraduates have been initiated into modernist poetry and fiction through *The Waste Land* (1922) and *Ulysses* (1922): the difficulty of these texts is an indispensable sign of their

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green* (London: Hogarth Press, 1959), p. 7; Patrick Swinden, *The English Novel of History and Society, 1940-80* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 57; Oddvar Holmesland, *A Critical Introduction to Henry Green’s Novels: The Living Vision* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 4; Michael Gorra, *The English Novel at Mid-Century: From the Leaning Tower* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), p. 25; Patrick MacDermott, *A Convergence of the Creative and the Critical: A Reading of the Novels of Henry Green through the Literary Criticism of T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 233.



modernity and a claim to their status as high art.<sup>2</sup> We have come to understand and accept modernist difficulty, even to revel in it as a means by which a text acquires meaning. With Green's novels, though, there is no fallback into a set of literary codes or modes of reading that can navigate through the interpretative thicket. As fine and subtle a reader as Frank Kermode used *Party Going* (1939) as an emblematic case for the hermeneutic problems of narrative.<sup>3</sup>

Marina Mackay argues that one of the central problems in coming to grips with Green's writing is his lack of direct affiliation with any critical school or tradition.<sup>4</sup> In an essay on C.M. Doughty, Green delights in how the Victorian travel writer 'seems so alone'.<sup>5</sup> Whatever its value as a critical statement, the phrase is prescient in plotting out the ambiguity of Green's legacy. He was influenced by the high modernists and shared with them a concern with form and the means by which language creates a world. But putting Green squarely into the high modernist camp, as John Russell does, is problematic.<sup>6</sup> His fiction does not impart a transcendent message, inspire a new consciousness, or contain a definitive worldview. Unlike

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<sup>2</sup> Irving Howe, 'The Culture of Modernism', in *Decline of the New* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), pp. 3-33 (p. 3); see also Leonard Diepeveen, *The Difficulties of Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Marina Mackay, *Modernism and World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 97. She has most recently argued that placing Green as an 'early postmodernist' might be 'a first step, potentially, toward resolving that enduring awkwardness about how mid-century fiction is to be categorized.' See her "'Is Your Journey Really Necessary?": Going Nowhere in Late Modernist London', *PMLA*, 124 (2009), 1600-13 (p. 1605).

<sup>5</sup> Henry Green, 'Apologia' (1941), in *Surviving: The Uncollected Writings of Henry Green*, ed. by Matthew Yorke (New York: Viking, 1993), p. 96.

<sup>6</sup> John Russell, *Henry Green: Nine Novels and an Unpacked Bag* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1960), pp. 4, 18.

much avant-garde writing, Green never pursues experimentation as an end in itself.<sup>7</sup> His work cannot be read through either twenties' aestheticism or thirties' social commitment, and his own generational consciousness, as I will argue, was highly fraught.<sup>8</sup> Seeing him as a realist is problematic because conventional realist fiction typically contains readily discernible chains of cause-and-effect, coherent characters and a unified, strong narrator – all qualities that Green's fiction lacks. Although often said to be a precursor of the *nouveau roman*, his work engages with social reality in a way that the novels of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Michel Butor do not.<sup>9</sup> At times the continental and American influences in form and treatment of language appear to deny Green the status of being a British writer; yet unlike most of his contemporaries, he disliked foreign travel, refused to have international settings in his novels even if doing so his characters would have 'ceased being ugly and drinking beer, and began instead to drink wine and to be beautiful', and Green excelled at a paradigmatic British motif, the comedy of manners.<sup>10</sup> He is the most individual of the writers of his time (it would be very difficult to mistake a page of Green's as anyone else's), yet also the most self-effacing.

This study attempts to unlock some of these paradoxes by arguing that certain displacements – of material reality and of literary conventions – create the

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<sup>7</sup> See Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. by Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968). Green's linguistic experimentation is interestingly described by Annie Dillard as 'experimental *plain* writing', which sets it apart from other experimental writing, which is almost always 'a species of fine writing'; see her 'Contemporary Prose Styles', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 29 (1983), 207-22 (p. 217, emphasis original).

<sup>8</sup> On how Green's basic themes mirrored those of thirties fiction, see Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> See Nathalie Sarraute, *L'ère du soupçon*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1996), pp. 1591-3.

<sup>10</sup> E.M. Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (London: Edward Arnold, 1965 [1905]), p. 105.

imaginative force within Green's novels. For while they are supremely literary and stylized, the 'unspoken communication between novelist and reader' is the outstanding subject of his few theoretical interventions.<sup>11</sup> The reader Green addresses has to be understood not only as a generic reader but also as a reader within a historical context, sharing Green's immersion within a particular society full of specific, complicated problems, and a literary tradition undergoing modifications in both the marketplace and the salons of high art. Understanding the social reality behind his novels is important not only for interpretive purposes but also provides insight into the sources of their composition. My work aims to reinvigorate Green studies by moving beyond a set of rich but ultimately singular readings and towards a more coherent and integrated understanding of his achievement.

### **A Case Apart?**

If Green is elusive and oblique, Joseph Hynes once observed, it is because of the lack of 'some sort of *context*' within which he can be situated.<sup>12</sup> But this lack may be more apparent than real because little effort has been put into finding such a context. A prevailing critical assumption about his fiction is what Barbara H. Brothers describes as its 'lack of concern for the verities of the objective world' and Michael Gorra, in his masterly book on the mid-twentieth-century English novel, as his desire

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<sup>11</sup> Green, 'A Novelist to His Readers: I', in *Surviving*, p. 136.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Hynes, 'Fitting: A Note on Henry Green in the Classroom', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 29 (1983), 422-9 (p. 422, emphasis original).

‘to create a prose so pure as to be abstracted from history itself’.<sup>13</sup> In the first full-length study of Green’s work, published during his lifetime and by his own publishers, the Hogarth Press, Edward Stokes had already set these terms of discussion by emphasizing Green’s lack of interest ‘in a specific, contemporary set of conditions’.<sup>14</sup> Following upon this, A. Kingsley Weatherhead approaches Green’s novels as self-standing entities divorced from any broader social context; his book of criticism foregrounds this autonomy by proclaiming that it contains ‘no appreciable direct contribution from any sources outside the texts of the novels themselves’.<sup>15</sup> The isolation of Green’s novels from their social context has been repeated in different ways: John Russell argues that Green’s novels are ‘bare of sociological ... implication’; Andrew Gibson asserts that they do not ‘create a world that [is] fully particularised’; and Oddvar Holmesland develops the intimidating doctrine that ‘correspondences between Green’s language and empirical reality’ are not of critical interest for understanding his ‘autonomous, non-representational’ novels.<sup>16</sup> Mario Praz sees ‘the placing of the story almost outside a definite time and space’ and ‘the nearly total absence of descriptive passages’ in Green’s novels as creating ‘the impression of abstract art.’<sup>17</sup> In Alastair Fowler’s handbook on the history of English literature, Green is called ‘an abstract, experimental artist’ interested above all in

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<sup>13</sup> Barbara H. Brothers, ‘Henry Green: Time and the Absurd’, *boundary 2*, 5 (1977), 863-76 (p. 864); Gorra, *English Novel at Mid-Century*, p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Stokes, *Novels of Henry Green*, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> A. Kingsley Weatherhead, *A Reading of Henry Green* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1961), p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Russell, *Nine Novels*, p. 13; Andrew Gibson, *Reading Narrative Discourse: Studies in the Novel from Cervantes to Beckett* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), p. 121; Holmesland, *Critical Introduction*, pp. 16, 216.

<sup>17</sup> Mario Praz, *Mnemosyne: The Parallel between Literature and the Visual Arts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 214.

technique and style.<sup>18</sup> Even Marina Mackay, in her historically sensitive study of Green's wartime novels, claims that his writing 'emphatically valorises ... private experience' above social and political reality.<sup>19</sup> For Thomas Foster, his novels 'may be the closest thing to pure narrative' existing in English literature.<sup>20</sup>

It is an underlying argument of this thesis that such views are mistaken, and that much can be usefully said about Green's work by relating it closely to aspects of its socio-historical and other contexts – literary contexts among them. Unlike the vast majority of critics, I also look beyond the narrow confines of Britain to consider Green within a larger European context. I shall argue that rather than creating an abstract art, Green's novels straddle the world of social reality and independent form, which is one reason he is a critical figure between modernism and postwar realism. Understanding the particular context of his novels, I shall argue, invalidates a number of near-unanimous critical readings of them. Considering the history of publishing young authors in 1920s Britain, for instance, makes it problematic to persist in the reading of *Blindness* as a *Künstlerroman*. Looking more closely at the unique culture of the Birmingham working-class reorients our reading of *Living*. But because critics have largely assumed that his fiction is autonomous, an elaborate and purely literary language game (the terms A.C. Bradley used when discussing the nature of poetry), these contexts have not been considered.<sup>21</sup> Even Green's literary

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<sup>18</sup> Alistair Fowler, *A History of English Literature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 332.

<sup>19</sup> Mackay, *Modernism and World War II*, p. 114.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas C. Foster, 'Henry Green', *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 20.3 (Fall 2000), 7-41 (p. 7).

<sup>21</sup> The nature of poetry is 'a world by itself, independent, complete, autonomous: and to possess it fully you must enter that world, conform to its laws, and ignore for the time the beliefs, aims, and particular conditions which belong to you in the other world of reality'; see A.C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1909), pp. 4-5.

sources are not investigated closely: the lengthy translation that cuts *Back* in half and which many critics see as essential to any interpretation of the novel has never been acknowledged as a literary forgery, although this fact puts into question the dominant view that the novel is above all a search for authenticity on the part of Charley Summers.

Behind the analyses I offer lies, of course, another issue: the continuing scholarly neglect – and limited circulation – of his novels and the hope that this study will provide a deeper engagement with Green’s work and in so doing make it more accessible. The fine and much-needed biography by Jeremy Treglown has not led to a Green revival in literary studies.<sup>22</sup> While most of his novels are now in print, with introductions by John Updike, Sebastian Faulks, D.J. Taylor and Treglown, they remain ‘relatively undervalued and overlooked’.<sup>23</sup> Patrick MacDermott’s *A Convergence of the Creative and the Critical*, published in 2009, was the first academic book of criticism devoted to Green in twenty years. One reason that Green remains a peripheral figure is that his work is thought not to offer any larger connection to either his time or other authors, an assumption that this thesis contests.

Broadly speaking, the existing criticism takes two general approaches to Green.<sup>24</sup> The first considers him from a technical and symbolist perspective, looking at the conscious experimentation of technique and style in his novels, which are

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<sup>22</sup> Jeremy Treglown, *Romancing: The Life and Work of Henry Green* (New York: Random House, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> Don Adams, *Alternative Paradigms of Literary Realism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 98.

<sup>24</sup> For a bibliography of early Green criticism, see Richard Heinzkill, ‘Henry Green: A Checklist’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 29 (1983), 465-70.

approached as isolated and self-standing art works, while the second largely reads him through the lens of his contemporaries and modernist predecessors. These two approaches at times overlap, for experimentation occurs against a backdrop that must be explained. The schema I develop should not be interpreted as attempting to elide the considerable methodological diversity in Green criticism which stems from changing academic fashions. There is also a growing recognition that Green's novels are 'are essentially heterogeneous, catholic in their methods,' thus prompting considerable latitude to the critic approaching them.<sup>25</sup> But all of the existing criticism, I suggest, is united in its abstention from a close examination of the contexts in which Green wrote.

The formalist branch of Green criticism includes such scholars as Stokes, Weatherhead, Brothers, Kermode, and Holmesland. Its starting point is Stokes's *The Novels of Henry Green* (1959), the first detailed study of the author, although there are anterior sources, such as Philip Toynbee's 1949 *Partisan Review* article which examines Green's 'conscious assault' on language.<sup>26</sup> While Stokes compares Green with contemporary novelists like Elizabeth Bowen and Ivy Compton-Burnett, he ultimately concludes that Green's novels must be approached on their own terms since they form, individually and together, a unity.<sup>27</sup> Stokes calls Green's settings 'symbolic' and accordingly proceeds to analyse the 'timelessness' of his novels (19). Because Green is 'more akin to the poets than to most novelists', Stokes does not

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<sup>25</sup> Andrew Gibson, 'Henry Green as Experimental Novelist', *Studies in the Novel*, 16 (1984), 197-214 (p. 209).

<sup>26</sup> Philip Toynbee, 'The Novels of Henry Green', *Partisan Review*, 16 (1949), 487-97 (p. 489).

<sup>27</sup> Stokes, *Novels of Henry Green*, p. 189. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

examine the social content of his work but instead concentrates on structural manipulations of the novel form and of language (7). The chapter titles give some indication of how the self-standing *œuvre* is broken down: ‘Methods and Techniques’, ‘Stories and Structures’, ‘Themes and Symbols’ and ‘Styles and Manners.’ The chapter ‘Proletarians and Plutocrats’ divides Green’s characters into types in an attempt to recreate Green’s vision: ‘But, as always, Green was less interested in a specific, contemporary set of conditions than in the individual human being, whose perplexities are ... symbolical of universal human problems’ (17). Stokes inscribes Green’s ‘psychological insight’ into human character as part of a larger ethical project to understand ‘life’, a term used by Stokes in a distinctly Leavisite way (94). In other words, Green’s fiction transcends a specific time and place to become an engagement with the larger problem of the human condition. While Stokes’s analysis is very strong on matters of form and style, this guiding assumption of Green’s purpose leads to highly subjective readings of the individual novels. For example, in his analysis of *Living*, which is called ‘not primarily ... a realistic novel’ (12), Stokes does not look at what Birmingham working-class conditions were like when Green was writing the novel – a decision that, as I will argue, obscures the novel’s underlying presentation of working-class life.

Weatherhead, while not as insistent on formal methods as Stokes, approaches Green’s novels through the ‘theme of self-creation’.<sup>28</sup> His driving view is that each novel creates itself from nothing and is self-sufficient; accordingly, Weatherhead

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<sup>28</sup> Weatherhead, *Reading of Henry Green*, p. 3. Further references are given after quotations in the text.



does not depend upon external sources or a larger context when interpreting the novels, claiming that ‘it is not the cultural aggregations, grist to the sociologists’ mill, that Green wants to talk about most’ but rather ‘the private movements of individuals’ (4). Because ‘each novel may be thought of as a separate species’ (144), the novels are read in self-contained, chronologically ordered chapters. The focus is almost entirely on the symbolic and thematic motifs within the individual novels, and the readings are not so much arguments as attempts to draw out guiding images and language. While Whitehead provides insightful readings of individual works, he does not offer a consistent approach to Green’s fiction. His book is part of a larger movement in the 1960s which read Green in a symbolist vein, the famous example being Eudora Welty’s essay on Green as a ‘novelist of the imagination’.<sup>29</sup>

This seemingly old-fashioned search for poetic meaning was criticized by Barbara Brothers, who claims that Green’s work is formally built upon a disregard of objective time; his ‘stylized presentation’ and the elimination of narrative progression and plot ensure that ‘time and place’ become relatively unimportant.<sup>30</sup> The ‘ironic questioning of sign and meaning’, Brothers argues, makes him a suitable

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<sup>29</sup> Eudora Welty, ‘Henry Green: Novelist of the Imagination’ (1961), in *The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays and Reviews* (London: Virago, 1987 [1979]), pp. 14-29. Also see Earle Labor, ‘Henry Green’s Web of Loving’, *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction*, 4 (1960-61), 29-40; Barbara Davidson, ‘The World of *Loving*’, *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 2 (1961-62), 65-78; Keith Odom, ‘Symbolism and Diversion: Birds in the Novels of Henry Green’, *Descant*, 6 (Winter 1962), 30-41; Bruce Johnson, ‘Henry Green’s Comic Symbolism’, *Ball State University Forum*, 6.3 (Autumn 1965), 29-35; Donald S. Taylor, ‘Catalytic Rhetoric: Henry Green’s Theory of the Modern Novel’, *Criticism*, 7 (1965), 81-99; and Myron Turner, ‘The Imagery of Wallace Stevens and Henry Green’, *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 8 (1967-8), 60-77. More recent symbolist readings include Carey Wall, ‘Henry Green’s Enchantments: Passage and the Renewal of Life’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 29 (1983), 430-46, Mark A.R. Facknitz, ‘The Edge of Night: Figures of Change in Henry Green’s *Concluding*’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 36 (1990), 10-22; and Benjamin Kohlmann, ‘“The Heritage of Symbolism”: Henry Green, Maurice Bowra, and English Modernism in the 1920s’, *Modern Language Notes*, 125 (2009), 1188-1210.

<sup>30</sup> Brothers, ‘Henry Green: Time and the Absurd’, p. 864.

case for ‘deconstructionist critics’.<sup>31</sup> An earlier deconstructionist reading that Brothers could have pointed to is offered in Frank Kermode’s *The Genesis of Secrecy* (1979), a work initially delivered for the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard University. Kermode begins his account of the difficulty of narrative interpretation through *Party Going*, which is called an inaccessible, enigmatic work whose meanings are never resolved: ‘Once loose in the text, the pigeon seems to alight at random on anything.’<sup>32</sup> For Kermode, Green is an author of a text-world which cannot reach across to reality for solutions or narrative keys. These deconstructionist approaches, while finding fallow territory in Green’s ambiguous novels, rely primarily on a guiding set of theoretical assumptions that have little to do with the work in question. Their utility is consequently a function of a larger series of philosophical arguments, and little of their approach can be used to build up a greater understanding of a particular author.

The growing rigour of narratology guides the work of Bruce Bassoff’s *Toward ‘Loving’: The Poetics of the Novel and the Practice of Henry Green* (1975). After reviewing the main current of structuralism and narrative theory, Bassoff argues that Green’s ‘novels do not fit comfortably into any of the major poetics of the novel that we have had in Anglo-American criticism.’<sup>33</sup> French criticism, though, is explored as a possible remedy, and Bassoff is fully committed to the view that structuralist poetics can provide headway into Green’s writing. The motto that the

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<sup>31</sup> Barbara H. Brothers, ‘Blindness: The Eye of Henry Green’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 29 (1983), 403-21 (p. 404).

<sup>32</sup> Kermode, *Genesis of Secrecy*, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Bruce Bassoff, *Toward ‘Loving’: The Poetics of the Novel and the Practice of Henry Green* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1975), p. 4.

study largely subscribes to might be Jean Ricardou's view that the novel is 'less the writing of an adventure than the adventure of writing.'<sup>34</sup> Each novel is a self-standing text, in which social reality is dismissed as a 'surface' reality. Bassoff is interested in Freudian archetypes in Green's fiction, although he does not fully explain the suitability of this choice when considering Green's pointed hostility to psychological analysis of characters. On his wartime novels, Bassoff claims that they do not 'express any awareness of the socio-historical dimensions of the war.'<sup>35</sup> Even on matters concerning narrative form, Bassoff's treatment does not stake out fresh ground but relies on pre-existing theories, which ultimately limits the value of the work.

Oddvar Holmesland's *A Critical Introduction to Henry Green's Novels* (1986) approaches its subject through the assumption that 'Green's preoccupation with literary form' makes his novels 'successive experiments in creating art.'<sup>36</sup> Holmesland explicitly states that he will not engage with previous criticism (vii), but he depends greatly upon Green's few critical essays, which are used to derive a full-blown theory of fiction that is applicable not only to the later novels but all of his work. Holmesland's study gives extended treatment to Eisenstein's theory of cinema montage and its effects on perspective and visual immediacy: 'only a montage approach can provide the key to understanding his fiction' (viii). The isolation of formal methods is repeatedly emphasized, as Holmesland notes that 'it should not be the object of the critic to discover correspondences between Green's language and

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<sup>34</sup> Paul L. Wiley, 'Review: The British Novel', *Contemporary Literature*, 18 (1977), 110-16 (p. 113).

<sup>35</sup> Bassoff, *Toward 'Loving'*, p. 141.

<sup>36</sup> Holmesland, *Critical Introduction*, pp. 2, 4. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

empirical reality' (16). Meaning is not social but rather linguistic: 'Full meaning only arises out of a special arrangement of words and visual images in juxtaposition' (7). Language and images 'do not primarily reflect a verifiable ulterior reality' but are 'technical devices which enrich the novel's style' (148).

The other school of Green studies attempts to provide a larger literary context in which to approach him. There is also a growing impulse to read his novels through a particular theoretical lens, such as trauma theory or feminism. The major critics associated with this approach are Melchiori, North, Russell, and Mengham. Its starting point is two essays from the early 1940s, Virginia Woolf's 'The Leaning Tower Generation' and Walter Allen's 'An Artist of the Thirties'. Both works have a slightly different focus, Woolf a generational one and Allen a literary period, thirties fiction.<sup>37</sup> Woolf looks at the novel's future for the generation born in Edwardian certainty and in school during the First World War; the generation, in other words, that Green was part of.<sup>38</sup> While she never mentions Green, whose work she began publishing at the Hogarth Press in 1939, the view that literary style and form could be explained by a generational factor was an important critical starting point for situating Green; Michael Gorra made Woolf's essay the backbone to his account of 'the most elusive writer of his generation'.<sup>39</sup> This literary-generational rubric has been used to read Green in Michael North's *Henry Green and the Writing of His*

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<sup>37</sup> Walter Allen, 'An Artist of the Thirties', *Folios of New Writing*, 3 (Spring 1941), 149-58; Virginia Woolf, 'The Leaning Tower' (1940), in *A Woman's Essays: Selected Essays*, ed. by Rachel Bowlby (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), pp. 159-78.

<sup>38</sup> In *Loving*, the children under Miss Swift's charge play under a 'leaning tower' where they watched doves 'quarreling, murdering, and making love again' until 'one more small mass fell without a thud, pink' (61). The nanny scolds the children: 'You're none of you listening you naughty children ... Here's poor nanny wasting her breath and you don't pay attention' (61).

<sup>39</sup> Gorra, *English Novel at Mid-Century*, p. 25.

*Generation* (1984). North's work, heavily indebted to Samuel Hynes's *The Auden Generation* (1976) and Martin Green's *The Children of the Sun* (1976), examines the consequences of 'the basic political fact' for 'the novelists of Green's age,' namely 'the utter irrelevance of the individual and his complete helplessness in the world of fact.'<sup>40</sup> While this might incline the analysis to concrete historical events, North looks mainly at the literary context, positioning Green with respect to Auden, Connolly, Isherwood, Waugh, Powell, and other writers of his time. While North astutely plots out the similarities and differences between Green and these authors, his readings of individual novels reach back to Weatherhead, as he argues that 'an individual achieves self-creation' in Green's fiction 'by concocting, from whatever trash is available, a narrative to inhabit' (195). The reader hoping to gain further knowledge of the 'eminently social basis of Green's fiction' ends up disappointed because North's understanding of 'social' is 'ordinary life ... the power of the everyday', which means that Green's characters and settings 'can easily be transposed from the factory to the living room' (215). The difference between a factory and living room, in this account, is of minimal interest.

The preceding generation of modernists is the primary focus of John Russell's *Henry Green: Nine Novels and an Unpacked Bag* (1960). In the first American book of criticism on Green, Russell not only provides an extended biographical presentation of his subject, he begins by trying to show 'Green's affinities with the experimental novelists of 1900 to 1925', namely Woolf, Joyce,

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<sup>40</sup> Michael North, *Henry Green and the Writing of His Generation* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1984), p. 10.

Forster, Kafka, and Lawrence.<sup>41</sup> This stated goal often gets lost in the study, which largely reads Green's novels metaphorically and thematically (18). Because they are 'bare of sociological or political implication' (13), Russell looks entirely to the literary meaning and context to derive their meaning. Giorgio Melchiori's study of Green, included in *The Tightrope Walkers* (1956), subsumes him within the 'common characteristics of the style of an age', which is related back to the crisis of belief in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>42</sup>

While the works mentioned so far begin with a preconception of what historical period or generational viewpoint Green fits into, the starting point of Rod Mengham's *The Idiom of the Time* (1984) is that only a 'broad view of the social and literary context' can 'account for the waywardness of a writing procedure'.<sup>43</sup> There is no theoretical apparatus driving the study; Mengham states that his approach 'cannot be rule-governed, because the writing [Green's] edges its way across a whole range of different, conflicting versions of contemporary history' (viii). While he often provides ingenious readings of the novels, aligning them within a rich literary tradition including the Bible, Keats, Eliot and a number of other works like James Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution* (1941) and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945), Mengham offers little social context about the changing British class system or how wartime affected Green's writings. When talking of the 'fixed representations

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<sup>41</sup> Russell, *Nine Novels*, p. 18. Further references are given after quotations in the text. Also see his 'Limbo States: The Short Stories of Henry Green', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 29 (1983), 447-54.

<sup>42</sup> Giorgio Melchiori, *The Tightrope Walkers: Studies of Mannerism in Modern English Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974 [1956]), p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Rod Mengham, *The Idiom of the Time: The Writings of Henry Green* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. viii. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

that impound society' in *Caught*, this potentially rich topic becomes reduced to 'the fixed representations that impound the novel' (84). This is part of the larger point that Mengham builds up to, namely how Green's novels are without a stable meaning: in *Loving*, for instance, 'the defective sensory apparatus ridicules the idea of a text having to reproduce sensory data, of the novel as a text that is turned towards the light, co-ordinated by a line of vision, a panoramic scan' (190). But this conclusion is also the starting point. To use an argument developed in Mengham's reading of Green's short story 'The Lull' (1943), there is a 'lull in meaning itself.'<sup>44</sup> As a warning against providing too much credence and authority to texts, Mengham's reading succeeds; but it comes at a cost, for there is an impression at times of an absolute epistemological nihilism, whereby all meaning is drained away.

More recently, Green's fiction has been considered from the perspective of a number of critical theories, although these readings largely focus on a single novel and do not attempt to offer a comprehensive re-evaluation of his work. Lyndsey Stonebridge thinks that *Caught* and *Back* make Green 'a trauma writer not before but very much of his time.'<sup>45</sup> The structural backbone to both novels is a traumatic event: the disappearance of Richard Roe's son, Pye's possibly incestuous past, and the wartime bombing of London for *Caught*, and Charley Summers's experience as a prisoner of war in *Back*. The limitation of Stonebridge's article is that it does not go far enough in using disability as a larger approach, encompassing both thematic and formal elements, to Green's fiction. Kristine Miller's examination of the sexual

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<sup>44</sup> Rod Mengham, 'Reading "The Lull"', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 29 (1983), 455-64 (p. 456).

<sup>45</sup> Lyndsey Stonebridge, 'Bombs and Roses: The Writing of Anxiety in Henry Green's "Caught"', *Diacritics*, 28.4 (Winter 1998), 25-43 (p. 27).

dynamics within *Back* attempts to show how servicemen fought a battle to reclaim their masculinity when returning to the home front.<sup>46</sup> This interpretation, though, employs a mistaken reading of *Back*'s textual *mise-en-abîme*; Miller's argument is also limited in its applicability, as the sexual aggressiveness of Green's characters is not limited by gender. Cultural studies and psychoanalytic readings have been given for *Living*, while disability studies have also appropriated his novels.<sup>47</sup> Green's work has also been subject to a reading through Adorno's view of the culture industry and reader-response theory.<sup>48</sup>

Patrick MacDermott's *A Convergence of the Creative and the Critical: A Reading of the Novels of Henry Green through the Literary Criticism of T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis* (2009) is an attempt to unite the 'dichotomy between aesthetic and social perspectives' in Green criticism.<sup>49</sup> He promises to approach Green's fiction 'as grounded in a specific historically-based framework. Rather than considering the texts in isolation, such a strategy provides the opportunity to explore in detail the full range and depth of resonances between them and their contemporary milieu' (22).

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<sup>46</sup> Kristine A. Miller, *British Literature of the Blitz: Fighting the People's War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), and 'The War of the Roses: Sexual Politics in Henry Green's *Back*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 49 (2003), 228-45.

<sup>47</sup> Carol A. Wipf-Miller, 'Fictions of "Going Over": Henry Green and the New Realism', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 44 (1998), 135-54; Peter Hitchcock, 'Passing: Henry Green and Working-Class Identity', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 40 (1994), 1-31; Lois Bragg, 'The Hard-of-Hearing and the Hardly Heard in Henry Green's Novels of the 1940s', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 26.2 (Summer 2003), 100-12; Pascale Aebischer, 'Creative Disability/Disabled Creativity in Henry Green's *Blindness* (1926)', *Studies in the Novel*, 35 (Winter 2003), 510-23; and Rex Ferguson, 'Blind Noise and Deaf Visions: Henry Green's *Caught*, Synaesthesia, and the Blitz', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 33.1 (Fall 2009), 102-16.

<sup>48</sup> David Deeming, 'Henry Green's War: "The Lull" and the Postwar Demise of Green's Modernist Aesthetic', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 44 (1998), 865-87; and Susan L. Carlson, 'Readers Reading Green Reading Readers: Discovering Henry Green through Reader Response Criticism', *Language and Style*, 17 (1984), 175-89.

<sup>49</sup> MacDermott, *Convergence*, p. 16. Further references are given after quotations in the text.



But the ensuing work fails to do this. The chapters all follow a template: the novel in question is contextualized with regards to the prior criticism and then assessed through Eliot's and then Leavis's criticism. There is little attempt at a broader contextualization of either the literary or social context, so while MacDermott mentions a 'specific [Mayfair] sub-culture' (91) depicted in *Party Going*, he does not explain what this was, in either historical or literary-historical terms. This also occurs when discussing *Caught*, which is acknowledged as intending 'to capture the sensibility and atmosphere of the time' (148) – yet what follows does not contextualize the Blitz or the Auxiliary Fire Service.

'In considering [his] writings, it is necessary to examine his circumstances,' Green writes about Doughty, and the same can be said about his own work.<sup>50</sup> Yet critics have not heeded this call, as for all the differences of approach these studies embody, what they have in common is a lack of close attention to the social and material reality on which Green draws and which he transforms. This thesis aims to remedy that failure and to provide a fuller context, both literary and social, in approaching his fiction. This study does not provide a biographical account of Green's fiction. Nor does it read his novels through an overdetermined application of historical context. Criticism requires catholic methods if it hopes to bring greater knowledge of a particular text or author; the increasing tendency of 'applying' a critical method to a text often creates a rather tedious labyrinth in which neither texts

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<sup>50</sup> Green, 'Apologia', in *Surviving*, p. 91.

nor criticism are well-served, locking us into the ‘reading gaol’ that Valentine Cunningham has trenchantly described.<sup>51</sup>

### **Organization**

Unlike the majority of Green critics, I do not give discrete analyses of his novels in chronological order. I structure this account of Green’s literary imagination through the seemingly inescapable conditions of social reality, by which I do not mean anything philosophically grand but such mundane matters as one’s time, social class, space, and body. These are not, of course, entirely mundane matters, but any lived life is constituted by these four factors.

Chapter Two, ‘Young and Old’: *Generations and Belonging*, looks at Green’s relationship to the writings of his contemporaries and what it means to belong to a generation. Generational thinking, and writing, distorts rather than truthfully reflects experience as ‘one looks at things through [one’s] generation’s spectacles’ (*Doting*, 201). Green’s writing was much more concerned with being faithful to the times he lived in, but doing so without the easy concessions other writers made when aligning their work with public events and places. In this chapter I focus on *Blindness*, the generational autobiography that is *Pack My Bag*, and *Nothing*. I conclude with a section on paternity and filiation, where I argue that

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<sup>51</sup> Valentine Cunningham, *In the Reading Gaol: Postmodernity, Texts, History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994).

Green displaces the basic unit of generation, the family, from a central novelistic position.

Chapter Three, *Class Representations*, is prompted by a question Georg Lukács once posed: ‘How could anyone, born a bourgeois, even conceive of the idea that he might live otherwise than as a bourgeois?’<sup>52</sup> If we substitute ‘write’ for ‘live,’ this question is intriguing for Green. Although born Henry Yorke in a grand country estate near Tewkesbury, his ability to write with sensitivity to the experience of different social classes makes him stand apart from his contemporaries. The shifting boundaries of the English class structure are a central preoccupation of his novels, and his own class displacement led to *Living*, which is in Green’s mature voice and the novel in which he worked through many of his theories of the form. I contrast *Living* (1929) with the dominant theory of interwar proletarian criticism and to three canonical proletarian texts, Robert Tressell’s *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914), Walter Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole* (1933), and George Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). I argue that these models all failed to offer any alternative to bourgeois aesthetics, whereas Green worked through a number of novelistic assumptions to create an alternative proletarian aesthetics for his novel. I also argue that *Living*, rather than writing a generalized or typological working class, must be read through the lens of Birmingham working-class culture.

Chapter Four, *Sites of Authority*, considers the meaning of geographic space, by which I mean both novelistic and social space. I suggest that the eclipsing of

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<sup>52</sup> Georg Lukács, ‘The Bourgeois Way of Life and Art for Art’s Sake’, in *Soul and Form*, trans. by Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1974), pp. 55-78 (p. 55).

narrative authority and the subsequent transfer of that faculty to the reader is a part of Green's strategy to displace sites of authority. While many of his contemporaries were similarly interested in the breakdown of authority, their concerns gravitated to more global conceptions of society, while Green stayed on the micro-level, showing the obliqueness of voice in characters and institutions as they respond to the physical world around them. I then look at Green's views of authorship, examining *Pack My Bag*, of all of Green's works the one where the formal reason for authorial presence was strongest, and *Back*, where the use of an unacknowledged literary forgery challenges the modernist presumption of authorial originality. The chapter concludes with an examination of the authority provided through education and the physical space of the public school.

Chapter Five, *Sensing the Whole*, has as its starting point the recurrence of disabled characters in Green's novels (the blind, amputees, and the hard of hearing). Biographically speaking, much of his fascination with such characters stems from the time when his family home served as a hospital for disabled servicemen during the Great War. But these characters are also tied to a poetical aspect of Green's fiction – the shape of the fictional whole (Green's elusive plot structure) and syntactical choices such as cutting off the *-ly* of adverbs and omitting articles. The impossibility of unity and wholeness sheds light not only on the physicality of modern man but also on wholeness as a mental and linguistic possibility when the times are 'breaking up.'<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Henry Green to Rosamond Lehmann; qtd. in Holmesland, *Critical Introduction*, p. 1.

The aim of this thesis is to provide a richer understanding of Green's fiction. By showing how social reality and literary contexts were subtly deployed and transformed in his novels, their complexity is exposed to be much greater than previously thought. Starting with the assumption that Green is a self-sufficient artist leads critics to see his texts as elusive, but my work shows a more nuanced author at work, one not only challenging formal and linguistic conventions but also using historical and social reality in rich ways. There is, though, no final word on Green, whose novels speak to individual readers in their own way. But interpretation is ultimately bound to a text, and the borders of the acceptable, if left undefined for too long, can create a sense of confusion rather than freedom. By delimiting the field which must be surveyed, the hope is that this work opens up a new path in understanding Green's achievement and continued vitality.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **‘YOUNG AND OLD’: GENERATIONS AND BELONGING**

‘Young and Old’ and ‘Progression’ were working titles for Henry Green’s first novel. Even though both were discarded in favour of *Blindness*, they uncannily foreshadow how his novels came to be an account of a generation’s development. His protagonists age alongside their author, who was born in 1905: there is the public school boy in *Blindness* (1926), published when Green was twenty; the young scion Dick Dupret in *Living* (1929), in his mid-twenties just as the novel’s author was; *Caught’s* (1943) Richard Roe, in his late thirties, just as Green had been during the war; and finally John Pomfret in *Nothing* (1950) and Arthur Middleton in *Doting* (1952), both in their mid to late forties like their author.

When Green began writing, generational conflict was a prominent subject among novelists, journalists, and social theorists. The *New Statesman* noted at the start of the 1920s that ‘[m]ore fiction has been written during the last two decades, and continues to be written, on the theme of the conflict between young and old, than on any other subject’, and the course of that decade would not prove the diagnosis

wrong.<sup>1</sup> While scholars have extensively examined the oppositional strategy of modernism to mass culture, capitalism and literary tradition, the conflict between ages has received comparatively little attention. In the 1920s, the ‘younger generation’ became a catch-word like ‘the proletariat’ or ‘the public’.<sup>2</sup> Some of this existed earlier, most famously in Randolph Bourne’s *Atlantic Monthly* essay ‘The Two Generations’ (1911), the pseudonymous *Les Jeunes Gens d’aujourd’hui* (1913), which contrasted ‘the distaste of life’ among the elder generation with youth’s pronounced ‘*taste for action*’, and Ellen Key’s *The Younger Generation* (1914).<sup>3</sup> But it was the First World War that ‘dug a chasm between generations.’<sup>4</sup> The rector of the Nancy Academy told students at the 1914 *rentrée*: ‘You are, in effect, our principal reason to live. But I have never understood as well as now that it is for your sake that people are dying.’<sup>5</sup> It was not only in France that such a sentiment appeared: ‘The Next Generation’, a 1915 editorial in *The Times*, called for reforming the physical and educational state of the country’s children because they would inherit the nation once the war ended.<sup>6</sup> *The Times* also expressed the common worry that the nation’s youth were off track. During the war the Home Office reported a 50 per cent increase in juvenile delinquency across 17 towns, leading the Metropolitan

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Books in General’, *New Statesman*, 14 February 1920, p. 558.

<sup>2</sup> J.E. Spingarn, *The Younger Generation: A New Manifesto* (Amenia, NY: Troutbeck Press, 1925 [1922]), p. 5. On Spingarn’s manifesto, see Michael North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> Agathon [Henri Massis and Alfred de Tarde], *Les Jeunes Gens d’aujourd’hui*, ed. by Jean-Jacques Becker (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1995 [1913]), pp. 60, 65 (emphasis mine). All translations mine unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>4</sup> Henri Massis, *Évocations: Souvenirs, 1905-1911* (Paris: Plon, 1931), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Qtd. in Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre des enfants, 1914-1918*, 2nd edn (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004), p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, 9 June 1915, p. 9.

police magistrate to state that the ‘increase of crime among children had startled the world into feverish anxiety about the whole problem of juvenile delinquency.’<sup>7</sup> In a 1923 article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, entitled ‘A New Generation in Britain’, Cyril Falls was quite critical of the increasing divisions within society. He distinguished between veterans, ‘who, in face of intolerable sufferings, remain the best-tempered, the honestest, the staunchest, and the least-complaining class in the nation’ and the group of men and women ‘now “of age,” who took no part whatever in the war,’ a class of youth Falls says mixes a bottomless pessimism with a lamentable addiction to pleasures and excitement.<sup>8</sup> The co-existence of two generations of youth – those who had been soldiers and those who had been in O.T.C. instead – raised the generation problem in the public mind and also made itself felt in the psyche of the youth of the day. What had been a sizeable and noticeable trend of thought before the war – that youth had different demands of life than their parents, and that the old way of life could not satisfy the thirst for modernity. Sherwood Eddy noted in *Sex and Youth* (1928): ‘Youth, after the war, which was followed by the breakdown or challenge of many of the old conventional moral standards, is confronted by sex problems to-day such as few other rising generations have faced.’<sup>9</sup>

Youth were not very interested, though, in criticisms of their waywardness, since they had their own world to construct in opposition to the one they inherited. In the volume of *The Eton Candle* (1922) that Green collaborated on, Brian Howard

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<sup>7</sup> *The Times*, 13 August 1917, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Cyril Falls, ‘A New Generation in Britain’, *Atlantic Monthly*, 131 (1923), 259-66 (p. 259).

<sup>9</sup> Sherwood Eddy, *Sex and Youth* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1928), p. 9.



blamed the ‘parcel of damned old men’ for the First World War.<sup>10</sup> Christopher Isherwood later described his guiding idea when writing *All the Conspirators* (1928) in generational terms:

Our youthful author is so emotionally involved in ‘the great war between the old and young’ that he keeps forgetting his lesser loyalties and antagonisms. His motto is: My Generation – right or wrong! Any member of it is automatically privileged to look at the world through his eyes. Non-members are automatically excluded from this privilege. *Their* inward eye, the author seems to imply, is permanently closed. They are already something less than human – in fact, old.<sup>11</sup>

Richard Aldington called *Death of a Hero* (1929) a ‘memorial ... to a generation’, by which he meant ‘the lost generation’, a term coined by Gertrude Stein a few years earlier.<sup>12</sup> The distance between young and old was growing, Radclyffe Hall noted in her best-selling and socially controversial *The Well of Loneliness* (1928):

She belonged to the younger, and therefore more reckless, more aggressive and self-assured generation; a generation that was marching to battle with much swagger, much sounding of drums and trumpets, a generation that had come after war to wage a new war on a hostile creation.<sup>13</sup>

Elizabeth Bowen observed that ‘[m]akes of men date, like makes of car; Major Brutt was a 1914-18 model: there was now no market for that make.’<sup>14</sup> Aldous Huxley, a master at Eton when Green was a schoolboy there, confided to his father that *Antic Hay* (1923) was

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<sup>10</sup> Brian Howard, ‘To the Young Writers and Artists Killed in the War: 1914-18’, *Eton Candle*, 1 (1922), 79.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Isherwood, Foreword to *All the Conspirators* (London: Methuen, 1984 [1928]), p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Aldington, *Death of a Hero* (London: Hogarth Press, 1984 [1929]), p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (London: Virago, 1982 [1928]), p. 387.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, *The Death of the Heart* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000 [1938]), p. 113.

written by a member of what I call the war generation for others of his kind & ... is intended to reflect ... the life and opinions of an age which has seen the violent disruptions of almost all the standards, conventions and values.<sup>15</sup>

Huxley's motivation to depict a post-war generation was not unique. Even the elderly caught the drift: then eighty years old, the president emeritus of Dartmouth called his 1919 memoir *My Generation: An Autobiographical Interpretation*, a title that could have been given to Cyril Connolly's *Enemies of Promise* (1938) or Christopher Isherwood's *Lions and Shadows* (1938), two influential autobiographies which cast their authors as representative products of their generation. Popular fiction stressing the generational divide included such titles as *The Education of Peter: A Novel of the Younger Generation* (1924), *The Rebel Generation* (1928) and *This Evil Generation* (1939).<sup>16</sup>

The twenties was also a high-water mark for generational theory, with works including François Mentré's *Les Générations sociales* (1920), José Ortega y Gasset's *The Modern Theme* (1923), and Karl Mannheim's 'The Problem of Generations' (1928).<sup>17</sup> The Second International Congress on Literary History, hosted in Amsterdam in 1935, was devoted to the question of Fernand Baldensperger, the

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<sup>15</sup> Qtd. in John Lucas, *The Radical Twenties: Writing, Politics, and Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), p. 64.

<sup>16</sup> *The Rebel Generation* is a historical novel of a Dutch bourgeois family, beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and ending in the present day. The difficulty of physical generation – Anna Speighel, who 'after thirteen confinements, had ... become rather infirm on her legs and moved with difficulty' (12-3) – is the counterpoint to the rebellion of modern youth, which is ungrateful for the sacrifices of its elders. See Jo van Ammers-Küller, *The Rebel Generation*, trans. by M.W. Hoper (London: J.M. Dent, 1928).

<sup>17</sup> François Mentré, *Les Générations Sociales* (Paris: Bossard, 1920); José Ortega y Gasset, *The Modern Theme*, trans. by James Cleugh (New York: W.W. Norton, 1933 [1923]); and Karl Mannheim, 'The Problem of Generations' (1928), in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. by Paul Kecskemeti (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 276-320. For a good survey, see Julián Mariás, *Generations: A Historical Method*, trans. by Harold C. Raley (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1970).

President of the International Commission of Modern Literary History and Harvard professor, namely, whether generations were ‘at the root of changing social life.’<sup>18</sup> There were also popular academic usages of the term. In 1927 Chatto & Windus published a two-volume history of England for the years 1900-26 entitled *This Generation*, a title also used for a 1939 literary anthology promising ‘to show the dominant moods, manners, and content of British and American literature from 1914 to the present.’<sup>19</sup>

Mentré, whose Sorbonne dissertation was read by Émile Durkheim and dedicated to ‘la jeunesse nouvelle’, claimed that generational theory was entering a new age. He dismissed the idea that a generation could be defined through birth years (the common method at the time) and insisted on the brute reality of generational life (‘the generation is a reality for every single individual’).<sup>20</sup> A generation could only be defined, Mentré argued, through ‘beliefs and desires’: it is ‘un *état d’âme collectif*’ (298), a notion similar to Ortega y Gasset’s definition as ‘an integrated manner of existence’.<sup>21</sup> In his application of generational thinking to literature and art, Mentré insisted that ‘spiritual generations succeed each other through opposition’ (244) - terms that echoed the idea, prevalent since Goethe, of

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<sup>18</sup> Fernand Baldensperger, First Panel, 18 September 1935; in *Second Congrès International d’Histoire Littéraire*, Amsterdam, 18-21 September 1935; published in *Bulletin of the International Committee of Historical Sciences*, 9.36, part 3, (September 1937), 264.

<sup>19</sup> *This Generation: A Selection of British and American Literature from 1914 to the Present with Historical and Critical Essays*, ed. by George K. Anderson and Eda Lou Walton (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1939), p. v.

<sup>20</sup> Mentré, *Génération sociales*, p. 47. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>21</sup> Ortega y Gasset, *Modern Theme*, p. 18.

literature swinging between periods of classicism and romanticism.<sup>22</sup> Not only did this provide a framework for understanding literary change, but through it one could, albeit in a circular fashion, define generations: ‘It is literary history which provides us the tableaux of social generations’ (324).

Despite the insistence of the popular press and social theorists on the importance of the generation to personal identity, Green’s novels were critical towards the belonging such an attachment could provide. He is also a difficult author to position generationally. In the title of Michael North’s book, *Henry Green and the Writing of His Generation*, ‘his’ could mean either leadership (as in Auden being the driving force of *The Auden Generation*, the work by Samuel Hynes that served as a template for North) or membership (as in Green being one of the children of the sun, to use the term popularized by Martin Green).<sup>23</sup> The title’s ambiguity is not cleared up in North’s analysis of ‘thirties fiction’ and the social and political reality for ‘the novelists of Green’s age’, where ‘age’ could mean either biological age or an epoch.<sup>24</sup>

In this chapter I investigate Green’s understanding of the generation as both a site of literary belonging and as a sociological cause of behaviour. My main argument is that Green is highly ambivalent towards his own generation and to generational thinking in general. I am not interested in placing Green within a

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<sup>22</sup> Cyril Connolly spoke of his belief in the ‘perpetual action and reaction’ in English literature since 1900; see his *Enemies of Promise*, rev. edn (New York: Macmillan, 1948 [1938]), p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: Bodley Head, 1976); and Martin Green, *Children of the Sun: A Narrative of ‘Decadence’ in England after 1918* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

<sup>24</sup> North, *Writing of His Generation*, p. 10. See also Germaine Brée, ‘The Post-Existential Novel’, *South Central Bulletin*, 24.1 (February 1964), 4, 22-6 (p. 24); and Gorra, *English Novel at Mid-Century*, p. xi.

literary generation but rather understanding the role of age and generational belonging in his fiction. I begin with *Blindness*, which I contextualize through the changed literary marketplace for young authors in the 1920s. The novel's protagonist, John Haye, desires to be a standard-bearer of the post-war youth generation, but I shall argue that he does not so much want to be an artist but a professional author. This distinction, which has not been considered by critics, has powerful implications not only for how the novel is read but also for understanding late modernist writing. In the section on *Pack My Bag*, which Jonathan Bolton groups under the term 'generational autobiography', I argue that Green privileges transgenerational experiences.<sup>25</sup> In its attempt to be universal, the memoir distances itself from subjective experiences. Whenever Green speaks of his generation, it is always with rancour. In this, he is no different than Isherwood or Connolly, who also saw their generation as a failure. But what makes Green's memoir unique is that it sees the generation as incapable of supplying group identity. I then look at *Nothing*, a novel in which everyone thinks in generational terms. The comedy of manners takes as its subject romance across generations. The most flagrant example is the mock marriage between widower John Pomfret and six year-old Penelope. Part of the comedy comes from the inversion of generational categories: the younger generation is serious and concerned, while the elderly generation is frivolous and sex-obsessed. All of the characters, I argue, situate themselves into generational categories and those who are 'between' generations are suspect. Yet these categories break down

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<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Bolton, 'Mid-Term Autobiography and the Second World War', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 30.1 (Fall 2006), 155-72.

through the course of the novel. Rather than explaining behaviour, the generation is a term used in psychologically suspect ways. I conclude this chapter by discussing paternity and filiation in Green's fiction. A generation is always defined by being situated between that of one's parents and one's children, and here I examine how these family ties are conceptualized in Green's fictional world. John Haye's family in *Blindness* is an artificial unit, with both his biological parents dead, but the revelation that John has inherited his dead father's epilepsy establishes a natural, blood-based transmission between father and son. John also comes to believe, and many critics have accepted this belief, that epilepsy heralds a promising artistic future. I will argue, though, that this reading minimises the changing medical understandings of the illness and that the novel questions John's link between epilepsy and genius, which problematizes the generational continuity between father and son. I then read *Back* and *Nothing* through the lens of doubtful paternity. In *Back*, Charley Summers believes that Ridley, whom he first encounters in a churchyard upon his return to England, might be his son with Rose. In *Nothing*, Philip Weatherby, who is considering marrying Mary Pomfret, wonders if Mary's father, John, is his biological father. In both novels, though, these paternity questions remain unanswered. Even if this raises the risk of incest, paternity is reconceptualised as a social rather than biological value.

### ***Blindness: The Generation of a Young Author***

The Eton Society of Arts was created by ‘a small band of enthusiasts, “for the purpose of creating a centre for the discussion of Art at Eton.”’<sup>26</sup> Its formation, Green remembers, was ‘a watershed, after this there was no turning back. I determined to be a writer...’ (*PMB*, 159). Elected its secretary, he notes that it ‘gave me confidence even if there was nothing in it so that, like everyone else, I began to write a novel’ (169).

Critics have not sufficiently considered that seemingly throw-away phrase, ‘like everyone else’.<sup>27</sup> While Martin Green’s *Children of the Sun* considers the budding authors at Eton, such as Harold Acton, Brian Howard, Robert Byron, and Cyril Connolly, I want to extend the orbit by looking at how publishers in the 1920s came to be attracted to the younger generation. I argue that situating Green’s debut in this context makes it increasingly difficult to read it as a *Bildungsroman*. The professionalization of young authors (and it is John Haye’s goal to become not just a writer but a professional author) can be seen as one reason for the aesthetic failure of the novels of the young generation, Green’s included.

#### *Publishing the Youth Generation in the 1920s*

In ‘Literature as a Profession’, a 1913 editorial in *The Times*, the unprecedented surge of aspiring young writers was met with the strongest discouragement:

There are now more youths than ever eager to be writers. There are more, indeed, than the public could possibly read, even if it regarded reading as a

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<sup>26</sup> *Eton College Chronicle*, 25 October 1923, p. 513.

<sup>27</sup> Although see my ‘Late Modernist Debuts: Publishing and Professionalizing Young Authors in 1920s Britain’, *Book History*, 14 (2011) [forthcoming].

sacred duty; and it can only protect itself against their importunities by a dazed indifference like that of harassed tourists in the East.<sup>28</sup>

The imperial imagery – young writers were compared to colonial beggars, distracting the good people of England from the real sights they wanted to see – revealed the extent of *The Times*'s strong feelings on the matter. A man with an imperial connection of his own, Edward Bell (his publishing house's Indian and Colonial Library sold nearly a million and a half books between 1894 and 1911), was equally emphatic in his rejection of young authors.<sup>29</sup> He had edited Chatterton's poetical works early in his publishing career, but in March 1914, when he heard of a proposal to turn the Author's Union magazine into a platform for young writers, he did no more than quote *Punch*: 'Don't'.<sup>30</sup>

The assumption behind these rejections of young writers was that they lacked the experience to write anything worth reading. This attitude changed because of the war. By autumn 1918, half of the British infantry force in France was under 19 years of age.<sup>31</sup> That youth was the war's greatest casualty was apparent to all: Wilfred Owen's 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' (1917) speaks of youth as 'these who die as cattle'.<sup>32</sup> *The Times* began printing war poems soon after the fighting began and continued publishing nearly one a day for its duration. Edmund Gosse estimated that 500 volumes of war poetry appeared in Britain between August 1914 and November

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<sup>28</sup> *The Times*, 2 June 1913, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> Oxford *DNB* entry.

<sup>30</sup> *The Times*, 24 March 1914, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> John Stevenson, *British Society, 1914-45* (London: A. Lane, 1984), p. 66.

<sup>32</sup> The original title was 'Anthem to Dead Youth', but in the course of revisions it was changed – 'doomed' was suggested by Siegfried Sassoon. See The First World War Poetry Digital Archive, Oxford University (<http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/>), which contains accessible images of successive manuscript versions of the poem.



1918.<sup>33</sup> Publishers scrambled to bring out letters or essays by soldiers who had died.

The manager of John Lane, B.C. Willett, noted in 1919:

Young soldiers ... have taken to writing, and whereas before the war they might have harked back in poetry to Greek mythology, they have dealt with their own experiences of the fighting, and it is a curious fact that a series of volumes on various war phases which we have projected sprang almost spontaneously from a number of manuscripts that came quite unsolicited into our hands.<sup>34</sup>

The *New Statesman* attributed the proliferation of soldiers' letters, journals and poetry to the widespread sentiment that these writings were 'beyond criticism', making '[i]t ... an ungracious task to estimate their promise or indicate their limitations'.<sup>35</sup> While some of these works came to have a lasting importance (Wilfred Owen's poems were published by Chatto & Windus in 1920), others were exorbitantly priced memorial volumes preying on public sentiment. This practice became so widespread that *Publishers' Weekly* condemned it as unethical.<sup>36</sup> Yet these volumes were profitable: in 1919 the Medici Society published a luxury edition of Rupert Brooke's collected poems, with a print run of 1,000 copies on Riccardi hand-made paper, Michalet boards, and linen backs at £2; the same in whole natural parchment costing £3; and 15 copies on vellum, bound-laced vellum, and silk ties at £26 5s.<sup>37</sup> Even though Brooke's complete poems were first published in 1915 and a popular trade edition was issued in 1918, the entire run of the Medici Society's

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<sup>33</sup> Edmund Gosse, *Some Diversions of a Man of Letters* (London: Heinemann, 1919), p. 264.

<sup>34</sup> 'Some English Publishers Talk of New Year Prospects', *Publishers' Weekly*, 19 January 1919, p. 138. Hereafter abbreviated as *PW*.

<sup>35</sup> 'Soldiers' Letters', *New Statesman*, 17 January 1920, p. 440.

<sup>36</sup> 'Post-War Publishing', *PW*, 7 June 1919, p. 1581.

<sup>37</sup> P.H. Lee Warner, 'Letters to the Editor', *Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 20 December 1919, p. 569. Hereafter cited *PCBR*. Warner was the publisher of the Medici Society.

luxury edition was quickly exhausted, showing the public to be especially receptive to what were essentially commemorative volumes.

Youth culture began to play a major role in the interwar redefinition of national identity, which pitted the need for cultural continuity against the new – the very topic of T. S. Eliot’s ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1919). Hugh Walpole feared that unless young authors were given the opportunities to publish, their talents would be forced into ‘the commercial novel’ or the cinema, thus diluting England’s literary heritage.<sup>38</sup> That heritage was considered a ‘storehouse of recorded values’ of a people: thus it had to be not only preserved for future generations but also continually revitalized to be a living tradition (as Eliot argued).<sup>39</sup>

In 1920, Evelyn Waugh, whose brother Alec was a bestselling *Wunderkind* with *The Loom of Youth* (1917), observed that ‘[t]he very young have gained an almost complete monopoly of book, press and picture gallery. Youth is coming into its own.’<sup>40</sup> Wyndham Lewis, expressing the high-modernist ambivalence towards mass popularity and money-making, slammed young authors for becoming ‘profitable.’<sup>41</sup> The explosion of Twenties young authors was startling. It was not so much that more youth were writing – many authors-to-be write at an early age, and some, like Aldous Huxley, even complete serious novels at the age of seventeen – but that so many novels by young authors were taken up with a view to financial

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<sup>38</sup> Hugh Walpole, ‘First Novels’, *TLS*, 18 September 1919, p. 500.

<sup>39</sup> I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961 [1925]), p. 32.

<sup>40</sup> *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. by Michael Davie (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), p. 103.

<sup>41</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Doom of Youth* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932), p. 3.

gain. When Ronald Firbank discovered in 1925 a novel he had written when he was ten, he jokingly related his pleasure at having had ‘the tact as a child not to rush headlong into print.’<sup>42</sup> While he was thinking of Daisy Ashford, whose *The Young Visitors* (1919) sold over 230,000 copies in two years, netting Ashford £3,600 in royalties, there were many other young authors around.<sup>43</sup> The list of British authors under twenty-five when their first novels were published for the years 1920 to 1933 is staggering: Harold Acton, Michael Arlen, H.E. Bates, Barbara Cartland, Leslie Charteris, Noel Coward, Daphne du Maurier, Pamela Frankau, Louis Golding, Henry Green, Graham Greene, Patrick Hamilton, Georgette Heyer, James Hilton, R.C. Hutchinson, Christopher Isherwood, Malcolm Lowry, Ethel Mannin, Beverley Nichols, Mary Panter-Downes, William Plomer, Goronwy Rees, Edward Sackville-West and Evelyn Waugh. While a survey of literary history shows that there are always cases of young authors getting published, the 1920s was different because of the institutional apparatus encouraging the process, which included publishers targeting youth, advertisements selling it, and a whole series of efforts to encourage the writing of young authors.

That publishers took such risks on youth was astounding since the British publishing industry faced a series of economic problems throughout the 1920s. These included the rise in paper and production costs but also industrial action; all

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<sup>42</sup> Qtd. in Miriam J. Benkovitz, *Ronald Firbank: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1969), p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> Daisy Ashford to Chatto & Windus, 12 June 1919, in ‘Letters from Daisy Ashford (Mrs Margaret Devlin) to Chatto & Windus’, CW 5/5, 2 folders, folder 1 (University of Reading Publishers’ Archive, Reading, UK), folder 1 [hereafter cited *DACW*]; Daisy Ashford to Chatto & Windus, 26 July 1919, in *DACW*, folder 1; Daisy Ashford to Mr Spalding, 31 July 1920, in *DACW*, folder 2.

told, ‘the complete production of a book in 1914 often amounted to less than the mere setting of the type does to-day.’<sup>44</sup> The *Daily Mail* reported in November 1919:

The man who is hardest hit by the present conditions is the new author. It is very difficult for him to find a publisher willing to undertake the risk of publication. The big firms, with their long lists of popular favourites sure of a market, are not ready to take him on; the small firms on the look out for works of promise find it impossible to do so.

‘I never publish a novel nowadays,’ said a well-known publisher, ‘unless I can print a first edition of 5,000 copies with a good chance of selling them.’<sup>45</sup>

Publishers, in other words, needed a strong reason to publish a debut novel as the industry, Geoffrey Faber lamented, was ‘fast degenerating into a gambling competition for potential best-sellers.’<sup>46</sup>

The young novelist who opened up the market to youths was Alec Waugh, whose *The Loom of Youth* was published in 1917 by Grant Richard (in the same week as Conrad’s *Youth*). It was a *succès de scandale* because it condemned public schools and discussed homosexuality within them. The novel follows Gordon Caruthers, who arrives at Fernhurst full of ambition and personality but finds that nothing matters except games. Learning is despised while ‘cribbing is an art’, the school masters cannot keep order and their authority is ‘a nuisance’ and the boys are moulded into a ‘satisfactory type’.<sup>47</sup> Eventually a friendly master shows him the right path, poetry, and Gordon leaves school determined to make something of himself.

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<sup>44</sup> Stanley Unwin, *The Truth about Publishing*, 3rd edn (London: Allen & Unwin, 1929), p. 45.

<sup>45</sup> Reprinted as ‘Publishers’ Profits and their Losses’, *PCBR*, 27 December 1919, p. 591.

<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey Faber, ‘A Publisher Speaking’, in *Publishers on Publishing*, ed. by Gerald Gross (London: Secker and Warburg, 1961), pp. 213-234 (p. 228).

<sup>47</sup> Alec Waugh, *The Loom of Youth* (London: The Richards Press, 1947 [1917]), pp. 54, 58, 141.

Although Waugh's father was the managing director of Chapman & Hall, the manuscript made the full round of the London publishers in 1916 and was uniformly rejected, showing how resistant publishers then were to young authors. The manuscript was put away until Alec's professor of history at Sandhurst, Thomas Seccombe, offered to put in a word to publishers. Grant Richards later described the book's acceptance at his publishing house:

Introductions are almost always out of place in novels but here was a special book in which an introduction with Thomas Seccombe's name at the end of it was bound to attract the attention of literary editors ... It would go out for review and, considering the fact that youth from all the public schools of the country was now going through the furnace and that the subject was of crying importance, the critics would surely be told to hurry up with their opinions. And they did.<sup>48</sup>

Seccombe's introduction spared no invective in blaming the Little England ethos of public schools for the 'furnace' in which youth were dying. He called the novel the song of the youth generation: 'They feel the most positive conviction that their elders have made a consummate muddle of things.'<sup>49</sup> He predicted that '[t]hey are going to do wonders, the new generation, by the Divine Right of Youth—that is to say, superior genius.'<sup>50</sup> The nation's cultural identity, in other hands, needed youth to revitalize it, and Waugh's novel was expected to be the first of a promising new movement.

As a literary effort Waugh's novel is not overwhelming (that he was so pleased to say that it was written in 'seven and a half weeks, which included a week

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<sup>48</sup> Grant Richards, *Author Hunting: Memories of Years Spent Mainly in Publishing* (London: Unicorn Press, 1960 [1934]), p. 196.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Seccombe, Preface to Waugh, *Loom of Youth*, p. 10

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

off half-way' says it all), but its polemical views towards education were topical.<sup>51</sup> Lord Desborough's 1917 report urging wholesale public school reforms used such terms as 'gross stupidity', 'blindness' and 'arrogance and stupidity'.<sup>52</sup> *The Loom of Youth* became part of that debate and was called the 'Uncle Tom's Cabin of the public school system'.<sup>53</sup> H.W. Massingham devoted a column to it in *The Nation*; the *Spectator* published correspondence on it for ten weeks; and there even appeared, shortly after it was published, a line-by-line refutation by a member of Pop at Eton, entitled *A Dream of Youth: An Etonian's Reply to 'The Loom of Youth'* (1918).<sup>54</sup> The Old Shirburnian Society – in a kind of literary fatwa – expelled Waugh. In short, the novel was a success, reprinted five times in the first three months after publication and eight times that first year.

After Waugh's example – a young writer rebuffed by scores of publishers going on to become the hit of the season – other young authors found themselves better placed to break into print. Andrew Nash describes how Waugh's success influenced publisher's reader Frank Swinnerton into recommending publication of *Prelude* (1920) by Beverley Nichols, who was twenty-one when it reached Swinnerton's employer, Chatto & Windus.<sup>55</sup> Having rejected *The Loom of Youth* in 1916, Swinnerton once again had to judge a public school novel written by a public schoolboy. Even though he had grave doubts about *Prelude*'s merit, his report notes

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<sup>51</sup> Alec Waugh, *The Early Years of Alec Waugh* (London: Cassell, 1962), p. 81.

<sup>52</sup> Qtd. in T. Pellatt, *Public School Education and the War: An Answer to the Attack upon Eton Education* (London: Duckworth, 1917), p. 53

<sup>53</sup> Waugh, *Early Years*, p. 48.

<sup>54</sup> Martin Browne, *A Dream of Youth: An Etonian's Reply to 'The Loom of Youth'* (London: Longmans, 1918).

<sup>55</sup> Andrew Nash, 'A Publisher's Reader on the Verge of Modernity: The Case of Frank Swinnerton', *Book History*, 6 (2003), 175-95 (p. 186).

that ‘we must not pass a money-earner with careless sangfroid.’<sup>56</sup> While begrudgingly accepting Nichols’s manuscript, Swinnerton lobbied hard for Chatto & Windus to publish Aldous Huxley’s *Limbo* (1920) because ‘it would unquestionably help to establish us among the younger writers as a house of distinction and enterprise.’<sup>57</sup> Virginia Woolf’s *TLS* review of *Limbo* noted that ‘Mr. Huxley is very clever; and his publisher informs us that he is young. For both these reasons his reviewers may ... give themselves the pleasure of taking him seriously.’ She wondered aloud whether it was wise for young authors to rush into publication: ‘Yet we cannot help thinking that it is well to leave a mind under a counterpane of ignorance; it grows more slowly, but being more slowly exposed it avoids that excessive surface sensibility which wastes the strength of the precocious.’<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, Chatto & Windus succeeded in branding itself as the house for young authors in the twenties, with a list including Acton, Ashford, Golding, Huxley, Rosamond Lehmann, Nichols, Owen and Peter Quennell.

Swinnerton’s desire to ‘brand’ Chatto & Windus is one aspect of the increasingly institutionalized promotion of young novelists. Fisher & Unwin’s ‘First Novel’ series was advertised as ‘[g]iving the young authors a chance!’<sup>59</sup> James Hilton, then a twenty-year old university student, was launched in that series with *Catherine Herself* (1920). John Long in 1920 began a £500 first novel competition (which it continued for a number of years); one of the losing entries which

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<sup>56</sup> Reader’s report, 23 July 1919; qtd. in Nash, ‘Publisher’s Reader’, p. 186.

<sup>57</sup> Qtd. in Nash, ‘Publisher’s Reader’, p. 191.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Cleverness and Youth’, *TLS*, 5 February 1920, p. 83.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Notes and Announcements’, *PCBR*, 17 July 1920, p. 49.

nonetheless came to be published by the firm was twenty-two year old Viola Bankes's *Shadow Show* (1922). F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* was published in Britain in Collins's 'First Novel Library'. Ethel Mannin was twenty-three when *Martha* (1923) won a first novel competition sponsored by publisher Leonard Parsons.

These contests not only unearthed young talent but also generated publicity: winners could be marketed more prominently than other novelists. Advertising had become a critical consideration for the industry, as James Ford argued in 1922:

[T]he science of publicity ... made its way rapidly and was speedily adopted by progressive publishers. The simple paragraphs of an elder age assumed a new and more interesting form, dealing not only with the books but with their authors, concerning whom all sorts of personal information was set afloat and widely read and quoted. ... Ideas for attracting attention took on a high value in the eyes of publishers, and many a book has been successfully launched on the uncertain sea of public approval by the adroit work of the press agent.<sup>60</sup>

While Ford is talking about the American market, the growth of advertising agencies in the 1920s made British publishers turn away from the traditional presentation of lists in plain Westminster type and toward more typographically daring efforts. They may not have gone as far as hiring sandwich-men to walk the streets of New York to advertise a new novel, as Alfred Knopf had done, but there was nonetheless an effort to modernize book publicity.<sup>61</sup> While Q.D. Leavis overstated the case when writing about the 'dangerous level of efficiency' in book advertising, she was not mistaken in highlighting its importance for the literary market in the twenties.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Qtd. in *PW*, 9 September 1922, p. 756.

<sup>61</sup> See Jennifer Wicke, *Advertising Fictions: Literature, Advertisement and Social Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 172.

<sup>62</sup> Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965 [1932]), p. 22.



If publicity is, as Lawrence Rainey argues, ‘the surest commodity of the modernist economy’, it is also true that publicity began to move away from the book and to the author – and a young one attracted attention *sui generis*.<sup>63</sup> In France Bernard Grasset, whose doctoral degree was in economics and who prided himself on being a ‘theorist’ of the book market, paid for a Gaumont news reel of ‘the youngest novelist in France’, seventeen year-old Raymond Radiguet, signing the contract for *Le Diable au corps* (1923). Grasset later explained: ‘I didn’t say, “I have found a great novelist.” I simply said, “I’ve discovered a seventeen year-old writer”.’<sup>64</sup>

Youth, in other words, was its own publicity. Mary Panter-Downes’s *The Shoreless Sea* (1923), written when she was sixteen, was serialized in the *Daily Mail*; her youth was the major selling point of the advertisements appearing on the side of London buses.<sup>65</sup> Rosamund Lehmann, whose *Dusty Answer* (1927) came out when she was twenty-six years old, told her publisher that she was ‘besieged with requests for photographs, interviews, personal notes etc.’<sup>66</sup> While complaining about these bothersome demands on her time, she dutifully accepted them and happily completed ‘a most astonishing questionnaire respecting my looks, tastes, hobbies, likes, dislikes, superstitions, etc. etc. etc. for publicity purposes’ because it had come from

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<sup>63</sup> Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 99. See also Catherine Turner, *Marketing Modernism between the Two World Wars* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

<sup>64</sup> Bernard Grasset, ‘Le Lancement d’un livre’, *Le Grand Écho*, 13 October 1931; qtd. in Monique Nemer, *Raymond Radiguet* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), p. 441.

<sup>65</sup> Oxford *DNB* entry.

<sup>66</sup> Rosamund Lehmann to Mr Raymond, 17 June 1927, in ‘Letters from Rosamund Lehmann’, CW 37/3, 4 folders, (University of Reading Publishers’ Archive, Reading, UK), folder 1. Hereafter cited *RL*.

the Book-of-the-Month Club.<sup>67</sup> When *Blindness* appeared, Dent's advertisement stressed Henry Green's youth: 'A very remarkable first novel written by a very young man.'<sup>68</sup> This aspect of modernist publishing is the starting point for understanding *Blindness*, which is about the desire of a young man to become a professional author.

### *Authorship as a Career*

The distinction between a professional author and an artist has been entirely overlooked by scholars working on *Blindness*. In her survey of the extant criticism, Pascale Aebischer observes: 'Most critics ... have agreed in describing *Blindness* as a *Bildungsroman* or *Künstlerroman* in which the tragically blinded protagonist, John Haye, overcomes his disability through his acceptance of its compensatory benefits and their exploitation in his writing.'<sup>69</sup> *Blindness*, Robert Ryf argues, develops John's 'spiritual sight'.<sup>70</sup> Alistair Stead calls the novel 'Green's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*', with John's blindness aligning him with the tradition of the blind seer.<sup>71</sup> Benjamin Kohlmann argues that in the novel 'metaphorical "blindness" ... is the prerequisite for a truly Symbolist aesthetic.'<sup>72</sup> MacDermott sees the book as John Haye's progression 'from being a victim of life to one in creative control' through

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<sup>67</sup> Rosamund Lehmann to Mr Raymond, 6 July 1927, in *RL*, folder 1.

<sup>68</sup> Advertisement for J.M. Dent & Sons, *PCBR*, 7 August 1926, p. 159.

<sup>69</sup> Aebischer, 'Creative Disability/Disabled Creativity', p. 511.

<sup>70</sup> Robert Ryf, *Henry Green* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> Alistair Stead, 'The Name's Familiar: An Aspect of the Fiction of Henry Green', in *The Uses of Fiction: Essays on the Modern Novel in Honour of Arnold Kettle*, ed. by Douglas Jefferson and Graham Martin (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1982), pp. 213-35 (p. 221).

<sup>72</sup> Kohlmann, "'Heritage of Symbolism'", p. 1196.

writing.<sup>73</sup> The logic of the novel's tripartite structure (Caterpillar, Chrysalis, and Butterfly) reinforces the *Bildungsroman* reading: the 'budding author' should realise his potential in the end, as the ancient Greek for butterfly, *psychē*, also means 'soul' or 'mind'.

The publishing history and professionalization of young authors in the 1920s casts *Blindness* in a different light. John is in search of a career: 'Some occupation must be found for him, it was the future one had to think about' (382). The most suitable employment, John thinks, is writing, 'the only thing in which the blind are not hampered' (463). What he longs for is professional authorship. Although he writes in his diary that 'there is a sense of degradation attached to appearing in print' (357), he is not being sincere: he hopes that one of his short stories given to a school magazine will be rejected so that he could 'send it up to some London magazine' (357). His understanding of the professional art network, and the need for a young author to become a part of it, leads him to write to 'several artists' to address the Arts Society. He is thrilled to receive a positive response from 'the biggest swell I wrote to ... the most flaming tip-top swell who has written thousands of books, as well as his drawings, which are very well known indeed' (353).<sup>74</sup> The Arts Society's *soirées* are full of 'wordy warfare' (351) from 'hysterical budding artists' (361).

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<sup>73</sup> MacDermott, *Convergence*, p. 111.

<sup>74</sup> The visit takes place on 14 November (353), so probably refers to Shane Leslie, who visited Eton in November 1922 (at the invitation of the Political Society). Leslie had just published a public-school novel, *The Oppidan* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1922). He was a first cousin of Winston Churchill, and while an Old Etonian, refused to send his sons there. Of his time at Eton, he notes: 'I played no games. I made few friends. I never won a colour ... Eton left me a literateur, desirous of letters and ready to appreciate the world of books. ... All miseries and loneliness and unpopularity were worth enduring for that.' See his *The Film of Memory* (London: Michael Joseph, 1938), p. 177.

The Arts Society partly exists to allow the young to find their own way in the literary marketplace. There are ‘too many old men to surmount’, a friend tells John about the professional art world (343). His stepmother’s literary taste seems indicative of a larger indifference to youth: ‘how the old days thrilled her generation, how blind they were not to see the glories of the present and future!’ (371). Yet John may not be the standard-bearer for youth, as his stepmother notes: ‘I don’t understand the young generation, you’re too free about everything, though in many ways you yourself are an exception to that, with your secretiveness’ (372). More problematic for John is the typically modernist anxiety about the awesome weight of literary tradition: ‘Oh, for a Carlyle now! Some prophet one could follow’ (360). ‘What fun it would be if I could write! I see myself as the English Anatole France, a vista of glory ... superb!’ (351).

The guiding view of the Arts Society – that a younger generation must form its own artistic tastes – animated the Eton Society of Arts and also Zurich Dada and the efforts of the ‘Three Musketeers’ (André Breton, Philippe Soupault and Louis Aragon), who launched *Littérature* in Paris in 1919. It also appeared in Mircea Eliade’s fictional autobiography, *Romanul adolescentului miop* [The Novel of the Myopic Adolescent], which has a section on ‘Muza’, an arts society run by teenagers: the novel’s protagonist delivers a paper on the *Ramayana* (in *Blindness*, John Hays lectures to the Arts Society on Japanese art).<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Romanul adolescentului miop* (Bucharest: Muzeul Literaturii Romane, 1989), pp. 96-111. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

The latter case is intriguing, for while there cannot have been any direct contact between Eliade and Green (who visited Romania in the early 1930s), the two works have uncannily similar themes. Besides failing or lost sight, both young protagonists gravitate to similar writers (Anatole France and Carlyle), both seek sexual awakening but are mystified as to how it would ever come about, and both have dim bourgeois families who either cannot comprehend what authorship means or discourage it. The first chapter of Eliade's novel, which he began when he was fifteen, is entitled 'I must write a novel'. The unnamed narrator says that he has the material for a novel from his journal but worries that the life of a schoolboy 'caught between books and children' will bore readers: 'I know that all the pain of a myopic adolescent won't move a soul unless this adolescent falls in love and suffers. For this reason I've thought of a character that at the beginning I called Olga' (5-6). The problem, though, is that 'I've never been in love; none of my friends has been in love as it is found in novels' (15). The myopic adolescent's story ends when he confronts Giovanni Papini's *Un uomo finite* (1912), which is, he feels, his double: his life has been lived and written already. At the end, he tries to rebuild his self but finds that this impairs his writing: 'I don't understand anything ... This novel tires me ... And I don't know how to write it and I cannot write it ...' (219).

John's own attempts at writing also fail. Whereas *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* concludes with a diary section, with Stephen Dedalus committing himself to exile and the lofty goal 'to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my

race’, the flatness of the diary which opens *Blindness* is not fundamentally overturned by any noticeable progression on John’s part.<sup>76</sup> The only piece of his writing after the blindness is the letter concluding the novel. Addressed to his friend B.G., it congratulates him on breaking into print. While his young friend is on his way in the literary marketplace, John is still beginning: ‘I am going to settle down to writing now’ (504). Yet to ‘settle down’ into writing recalls his mother’s earlier wish for him: ‘But it was an anxious time for Momma, waiting to see him settled. And it was the end, to settle down. He could not; one did not dare to’ (440). The duty to experiment and follow the path of artistic integrity has been forsaken, and there is no reason to think that John will be an artist. He could become, though, a young author whose life story – a promising public schoolboy tragically blinded in a senseless accident – would appeal to publishers.

### *Late Modernist Careers*

There is a certain irony in reading *Blindness*, published when Green was twenty-one, as a cautionary tale about the pitfalls of professional authorship. While Evelyn Waugh considered that it was ‘extraordinary ... that anyone of our generation could have written so fine a book’, Green later deplored ‘the snobbish way everything was put’ in his debut and thought it unreadable.<sup>77</sup> But if *Blindness* is indeed a critique of the professionalization of young authors, it helps us to understand late modernism,

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<sup>76</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), p. 288.

<sup>77</sup> Evelyn Waugh to Henry Yorke, 1926, in *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh* [hereafter cited *Letters EW*], ed. by Mark Armory (New Haven: Ticknor and Fields, 1980), p. 24; David Lambourne, “‘No Thundering Horses’: The Novels of Henry Green”, *Shenandoah: The Washington and Lee University Review*, 26.4 (Summer 1975), 57-71 (p. 61).

which critics often characterize as a falling away from high modernist experimentation.<sup>78</sup>

Because publishers in the 1920s were consciously targeting young writers for publication, an author's formative struggle was removed. It became easier to publish, provided one accepted the norms of the publishing world at an early age, which potentially meant, in the long run, a diminished tendency for experimentation. The process of professionalization could begin as early as age twelve, as in the case of Nathalia Crane, a child poet from Brooklyn, who was inducted into the British Society of Authors, Playwrights and Composers in 1925.<sup>79</sup> Christopher Wilson, surveying literary professionalism in early 20<sup>th</sup> century America, notes that writers 'came to see their craft predominantly as the product of technical expertise rather than inspiration, viewed the market as the primary arbiter of literary value, and were guided principally by an internalized sense of responsibility to their public.'<sup>80</sup> Professionalization in 1920s Britain had even stronger effects on young authors because the institutional dynamic of the publishing industry targeted them at an earlier age than ever before. While Gertrude Stein could distinguish between her 'moneymaking style' and her 'really creative one', this kind of split, which is already deeply problematic, would be even harder to make if professionalization occurred in

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<sup>78</sup> On the deflation of form in late modernism, see Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 18

<sup>79</sup> David Sadler, 'Innocent Hearts: The Child Authors of the 1920s', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 17 (1992), 24-30 (p. 25).

<sup>80</sup> Christopher Wilson, *The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), p. 204.

one's youth.<sup>81</sup> Instead of working to create one's own audience, the young author accepted the existent one.

Émile Zola, in 'The Influence of Money in Literature', argued that the natural selection of the market ensures that only authors who persist, and thus have developed something to say, are rewarded. About those young aspirants whose literary instinct was killed off by journalism, his pitiless retort was that '[j]ournalism kills those who should be killed off, that is all.'<sup>82</sup> Zola's argument was echoed in 1927 by Richard Le Gallienne, who saw the current ease of publication for young authors as destructive to art:

The old proverbial way was to starve genius in his garret. The new way is to kill him with kindness, to drown him in honey. Both ways, of course, are bad; but the old way was the best. For, as a matter of fact, genius cannot be starved; and, so long as it is not carried too far, the process is salutary. Premature laurel, on the contrary, is too apt to provoke that premature self-satisfaction which inevitably ends in premature decay. For a writer to be 'discovered' too soon is frequently a misfortune. His gift is best served by an apprenticeship to obscurity. In obscurity he relies upon himself. When he has become famous he is too apt to rely upon his public; and he may even come to regard the puffs of his publishers as the verdict of posterity.<sup>83</sup>

When young authors had little chance of breaking into print, they had to work outside the marketplace to develop their voice and style. This changed in the 1920s when a young author began to see so many of his or her peers getting reviews in the *TLS* or being considered for inclusion into the Book-of-the-Month Club. As Malcolm Cowley noted, young authors now enjoyed easy access to publishers as long as their

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<sup>81</sup> Timothy W. Galow, 'Literary Modernism in the Age of Celebrity', *Modernism/Modernity*, 17 (2010), 313-329 (p. 315).

<sup>82</sup> Émile Zola, 'The Influence of Money in Literature', in *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays*, trans. by Belle M. Sherman (New York: Cassell, 1892), pp. 161-206 (p. 185).

<sup>83</sup> Richard Le Gallienne, 'On the Present Inflation of Literary Values', *New Statesman*, 8 January 1927, p. 387



work was ‘fashionable’.<sup>84</sup> The fashionable, in Q.D. Leavis’s mind, meant a ‘thoroughly commercialized ... fiction market’ with ‘stereotyped ... demands’.<sup>85</sup> Juliet McMasters, the founder of the Juvenilia Press, has observed that young writers tend to be drawn to pre-existing models: they ‘are fascinated by the book as object, and in many ways, it seems, the book generates the story, rather than the other way round.’<sup>86</sup> In her analysis, they are inherently imitative because they do not have a wide arena of judgment. Joseph Conrad took pride in having had the time to ripen before publishing because ‘a man who never wrote a line for print till he was thirty-six cannot bring himself to look upon his existence and his experience ... as only so much material’ for his books.<sup>87</sup> Young authors, by implication, do not have an independent perspective to evaluate life but see everything in terms of literature. As the *New Statesman*, commenting on the phenomenon of young authors, argued in 1922, ‘[a] too early spring is often as disastrous to an artist as to a garden.’<sup>88</sup>

Added to this was a publishing trade that began to treat authors like industrialized workers, resulting in a cannibalization of writers and literary quality that was decried even in *Publishers’ Circular*:

An author makes a hit with a story which deserves its success, too often he is pounced upon by literary agencies and syndicates whose dazzling offers lead him against his better judgment to bind himself to produce so many new novels in a stipulated time. It is needless to enlarge on what is almost certain to happen to the author—bound like a machine to turn out so much in a given

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<sup>84</sup> Malcolm Cowley, ‘Matthew Josephson’ (mid-1940s), in Newberry Library (Chicago, Illinois), Midwest MS Cowley, Series 2, Box 106, Folder 5000.

<sup>85</sup> Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 31.

<sup>86</sup> Juliet McMasters, ‘“Adults’ Literature,” By Children’, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 25 (2001), 277-99 (p. 289).

<sup>87</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘A Familiar Preface’ to *A Personal Record*, in *A Personal Record; Notes on Life and Letters* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1928), pp. xiii-xxiii (pp. xv-xvi).

<sup>88</sup> ‘Youth’, *New Statesman*, 20 May 1922, pp. 177-78.

time. It often happens that in a few years the syndicate has exhausted the author who has also exhausted his public—then another victim is fastened on. Good work cannot be produced under this hot-house forcing system.<sup>89</sup>

Writing was coming to be conceptualised as a craft, and a spate of books appeared that promised budding authors success in the marketplace: *How to Write Stories for Money* (1920), *How to Write and Sell Short Stories* (1926), and *Creative Writing: A Guide for Those Who Aspire to Authorship* (1929). The series of books by publisher Michael Joseph on professional authorship, covering short story writing, journalism, serial fiction and magazine stories, were compiled into *Complete Writing for Profit* (1930). The Gloucester Writers' Circle, Christopher Hilliard notes, was originally called the Gloucester Profit-Writer's Circle.<sup>90</sup> Allen Clark Marple's *Write It and Sell It* was a natural continuation of his novel, *Best Seller: The Story of a Young Man who Came to New York to Write a Novel about a Young Man who Came to New York to Write a Novel* (1930). The title comes full circle to the problem at hand: that writing was increasingly about profit rather than literary art, and the *Well-to-Do Author* (a 1920 novel by Pett Ridge, a popular novelist, in which 'the adolescent population' has 'plenty of money to burn') could be its own story: the *Künstlerroman* gives way to the *Bestsellerautorroman*.<sup>91</sup>

The downside of treating writing as a professional craft, as Arthur Clutton Brock argued in a 1918 *TLS* cover article, was that it offered quick, technical answers, since 'it is much easier to write professional verses in any style than to

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<sup>89</sup> 'The Bookselling Problem To-Day', *PCBR*, 15 January 1921, p. 35.

<sup>90</sup> Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents: The Democratization of Writing in Britain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 39.

<sup>91</sup> 'Well-to-Do Author', *TLS*, 19 February 1920, p. 123.

write songs of innocence.’<sup>92</sup> Peter Quennell, whose first book of verse was published in 1922, before he went up to Oxford, explained his later decision to quit writing verse because of exactly that reason: he stopped because he felt that he ‘was making a self-conscious literary effort, merely assembling images and manufacturing lines’ and, from his experience, ‘manufactured verse, however clever, competent and smooth, was among the dullest types of literature.’<sup>93</sup> Because writing had been reconceptualised as a craft, publishers now expected young authors to produce new books at a reasonably brisk pace—not so fast that they appeared to be pot-boilers, but not so slow as to confound deadlines. This pressure to produce after the first novel was partly driven by the publisher, who wished to capitalize on the success of a first book, and partly driven by the author, who needed the advance from the contract to live. Those advances were comparatively small, certainly lower than those available to Victorian authors when the triple-decker ruled the library stalls, which meant, according to Mark Morrisson, that ‘any young, untested, “highbrow” writer who had a family and wished to live a moderately middle-class life had to publish frequently.’<sup>94</sup> A number of young authors did just that. Beverley Nichols, after the publication of *Prelude* in 1920, wrote two more novels in the next two years. Patrick Hamilton, whose first novel was published in 1925, when he was twenty one, had produced his third novel three years later. Graham Greene, twenty-

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<sup>92</sup> Anon. [Arthur Clutton-Brock], ‘Professionalism in Art’, *TLS*, 31 January 1918, 49-50 (p. 50); qtd. in Louis Menand, *Discovering Modernism: T.S. Eliot and His Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 123.

<sup>93</sup> Peter Quennell, *The Marble Foot: An Autobiography, 1905-1938* (London: Collins, 1976), p. 152.

<sup>94</sup> Mark Morrisson, ‘Selling Modernism’, *Modernism/Modernity*, 5 (1998), 155-62 (p. 158). Morrisson’s data on Victorian advances come from P.J. Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel, 1875 – 1914* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1989), pp. 422-5.

five years old when his first novel was published in 1929, wrote two forgettable novels in the next two years; Daphne du Maurier was at five novels in seven years after a 1929 debut (when she was twenty two).

Evelyn Waugh's early career shows this process at work. Having had his first work, a biography of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, commissioned by his friend, Anthony Powell, Waugh initially made the bulk of his income through journalism and reviews. His earnings, while high for their time, were not sufficient for the lifestyle he wished to lead, so when he was at work in the summer of 1929 on his second novel, *Vile Bodies*, Waugh wrote Green of his desperate need for money and how he 'must write a lot quickly.'<sup>95</sup> He told Harold Acton that his novel was 'a welter of sex and snobbery written simply in the hope of selling some copies.'<sup>96</sup> And copies were sold: 'Those Vile Bodies seem to be selling like Hot Cakes,' he exulted.<sup>97</sup> His satire targets authorship as a profession: the plot revolves around Adam Fenwick-Symes's financial problems after his manuscript (written in Paris) is seized by a customs official, who calls it 'just downright dirt'.<sup>98</sup> Adam's defence is not a high-spirited call for art but simply that his 'whole livelihood depends on this book' (25). His writing is purely commercial: as the otherwise sympathetic publisher puts it, his work was scheduled for a fortnight's run before 'Johnnie Hoop's autobiography', which the publisher dubs 'a seller' (33). While Waugh might have satirized the

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<sup>95</sup> Evelyn Waugh to Henry Yorke, June 1929, in *Letters EW*, p. 36.

<sup>96</sup> Evelyn Waugh to Harold Acton, July 1929, in *Letters EW*, p. 37.

<sup>97</sup> Waugh to A.D. Peters, January 1930; qtd. in Robert Garnett, *From Grimes to Brideshead: The Early Novels of Evelyn Waugh* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1990), p. 76.

<sup>98</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977 [1930]), p. 25. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

professionalism of art, he had no qualms embodying the author-salesman, telling his agent that ‘it would be nice if we could persuade them [newspaper editors] that I personify the English youth movement.’<sup>99</sup> His conversion to Roman Catholicism was made an exclusive for Tom Driberg, with the resultant story headlined ‘Young Satirist of Mayfair.’<sup>100</sup> In his 1930 travel book, *Labels*, Waugh’s tips on the ‘arts of successful authorship’ boil down to keeping ‘one’s name’ prominent to publishers and readers.<sup>101</sup> Waugh might have intended Adam Fenwick-Symes to be a satire of would-be-writers in the changing publishing world, but the bitterness of the portrayal may have come from Waugh not being far removed from his creation.

My reading of *Blindness* as a potential critique of young authorship is buttressed by Green’s later attitudes towards authorship, which will be examined in further depth in Chapter Four. The publication of *Blindness* had given him a certain celebrity among the aesthetes at Oxford, and he admits to this having filled his head at the time and for a while frequented Lady Ottoline Morrell’s Garsington set. Yet Green decided to leave London and to work full-time in his family’s engineering firm. After *Blindness*, Edward Garnett pressed him for a light, upper-class comedy, ‘not *too* intellectual,’ he advised, but ‘kindly, satirical view[s] of the activities of the whole tribe.’<sup>102</sup> Green, though, produced *Living*, an experimental proletarian novel. Having published two novels by the age of twenty-four, Green’s distrust of

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<sup>99</sup> Waugh to A.D. Peters, (n.d., but late 1928 or early 1929), in *Letters EW*, p. 30.

<sup>100</sup> *Daily Express*, 30 September 1930; qtd. in Douglas Lane Patey, *The Life of Evelyn Waugh: A Critical Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1998), p. 35.

<sup>101</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Labels: A Mediterranean Journey* (London: Duckworth, 1930), pp. 9-10. Waugh advised Green to be married ‘very obtrusively – a fashionable wedding is worth a four column review in the *Times Literary Supplement* to a novelist’ (Evelyn Waugh to Henry Yorke, 4 May 1929, in *Letters EW*, p. 34).

<sup>102</sup> Qtd. in Treglown, *Romancing*, p. 70 (emphasis original).

authorship as a profession and his income from other sources (he never, for instance, went in for review work or journalism) meant that he could afford to wait ten years before *Party Going* came out. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Green ‘was a far more consciously experimental novelist than any of his contemporaries’, the only one carrying forward the modernist project in a period that David Lodge calls ‘generally unsympathetic to aesthetic experimentation.’<sup>103</sup>

### ***Pack My Bag: Beyond Generations***

In autobiography, Annie Kriegel argues, authors inevitably link themselves to their generation: ‘No writer of memoirs, no chronicler, no autobiographer ... can resist the temptation to justify his undertaking by making it appear collective, and to introduce his subject by stating that “to belong to the generation that ....”’<sup>104</sup> In a different context, David Perkins has supplied a possible explanation for this: ‘When a writer classifies himself, he places himself with literary history. Thus, implicitly, he prefers a claim for survival and attempts to define the terms in which literary history will characterize him.’<sup>105</sup> A number of authors from the late 1930s to the late 1940s, prompted by ‘the need to control how one’s generation is remembered’, wrote what

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<sup>103</sup> Gorra, *English Novel at Mid-Century*, p. 9; David Lodge, *The Practice of Writing: Essays, Lectures, Reviews and a Diary* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1996), p. 119.

<sup>104</sup> Annie Kriegel, ‘Generational Difference: The History of an Idea’, in *Generations*, ed. by Stephen Graubard (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), pp. 23-38 (p. 32).

<sup>105</sup> David Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 115-6.

Jonathan Bolton calls ‘generational autobiograph[ies]’.<sup>106</sup> As an example, the subject of Christopher Isherwood’s *Lions and Shadows: An Education in the Twenties* (1938) is not really himself but

[a] young man living at a certain period in a certain European country, is subjected to a certain kind of environment, certain stimuli, certain influences. That the young man happens to be myself is only of secondary importance: in making observations of this sort, everyone must be his own guinea-pig.<sup>107</sup>

The works Bolton identifies in this period genre include that text as well as Connolly’s *The Enemies of Promise* (1938), Green’s *Pack My Bag* (1940), Edwin Muir’s *The Story and the Fable* (1940), Louis MacNeice’s *The Strings Are False* (written in 1940), Elizabeth Bowen’s *Seven Winters* (1942), Orwell’s ‘Such, Such Were the Joys’ (written in 1948), and Stephen Spender’s *World Within World* (1950).<sup>108</sup>

The inclusion of *Pack My Bag* in this genre of generational autobiography is problematic. Its fundamental purpose is to present common experiences, whereas generational identity is treated ambivalently. Since ‘we have no time to chew another book’ (1), Green is forced to adopt a form that is ‘directly personal’ (1). He laments this: good writing evokes ‘universal remembered feelings’ (29), not subjective experience. There is not much that is ‘directly personal’ about *Pack My Bag*, though. It refuses to name its author except by proxy – the writer, in other words, refuses to take possession of the book. Not only is there no clear, direct portrait of its author,

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<sup>106</sup> Bolton, ‘Mid-Term Autobiography’, p. 156. See also Gerald Barrett, ‘Disrobing in the Vestry: Autobiographical Writing in the Thirties’, *The Irish Review*, 13 (Winter 1992/1993), 22-30.

<sup>107</sup> Christopher Isherwood, *Lions and Shadows: An Education in the Twenties* (New York: Pegasus, 1947 [1937]), p. 7.

<sup>108</sup> Bolton, ‘Mid-Term Autobiography’, p. 155.

*Pack My Bag* shows Green deeply reluctant to mention the living: '[a]nyone who writes what he remembers of his own time ... has to decide whether he will mention the living' (83). When he writes about 'my generation', it is with misgivings:

This feeling my generation had in the war, of death all about us, may well be exaggerated in my recollection by the feeling I have now I shall be killed in the next. Also anyone who was young at that time, too young to fight that is, would naturally if he has imagination make much out of what he remembers as he goes over and over it afterwards as we all do. (74)

The 'formative event' of Green's generation – being in school during the Great War – cannot be the basis of a group identity because its reality has been reworked and adjusted to fit the pressures of the present day. It has no independent force but is simply what has come to be believed over time, and, as *Pack My Bag* increasingly details, falsely so.

The first instance of Green reaching out towards a communal understanding of experience is when looking forward to the coming war. It has often been pointed out that formulas for impending death recur throughout *Pack My Bag*: 'the war which seems to be coming upon us now' (1); 'now we are older, we may die both ways at one time' (28); we are 'facing a slow death in the shelter they have made our basement into ... as the siren goes and frightened we begin to forget' (49-50); the world of '1912 seems strange enough when what they are going to use to kill us was not even invented, just a toy or a dream' (56); 'today sooner than tomorrow' the end will come (100); 'we might have to die not so long after we came to be old boys' (124), '[w]e who must die soon' (139); 'death in my case I am afraid will come to soon ... that threat of war which drives one into a last attempt to explain objectively



and well' (161), 'in the light of imminent death, that rather ghastly colour in the sky of mustard yellows with the sirens wailing their call of now you may have to die' (203); '[o]ne may resent being killed, but most of us are quite ready' (231). Mengham observes that the memoir is 'taxed by the prospect of death', Stead calls its tone 'hysterical' and Mark Rawlinson speaks of its 'apocalyptic rhetoric'.<sup>109</sup> Despite this awareness, there has been no convincing explanation of the function of Green's peculiar idiom. The pervasive atmosphere of the coming war that fissures Green's memoir, while melodramatic or even paranoid, is essential to establishing innocence in the face of coming disaster. In his use of 'we' or 'us', this innocence is not limited to the author but belongs to the entire community.<sup>110</sup>

The limitation of the personal is evident in the manner in which Green's home is treated. If one accepts Gaston Bachelard's view of the house as a place which, through memory, allows us to 'learn to "abide" within ourselves,' then Green's house plays an ambiguous role in constructing and asserting his personal identity.<sup>111</sup> There is no mention of the renovation work from 1912 to 1914, which modernized the home by installing electricity and improving the domestic water supply; no doubt the cruel irony of modernization completed as atavism began was haunting.<sup>112</sup> There is little visual description of the house, no sense of its geographic

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<sup>109</sup> Mengham, *Idiom of the Time*, p. 53; Stead, 'Name's Familiar', p. 215; and Mark Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 69.

<sup>110</sup> On the 'numerous portraits depicting the nation as a unified community of ordinary people' during WWII, see Sonya Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 6.

<sup>111</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. xxxiii.

<sup>112</sup> Helen Smith, 'Philip Webb's Restoration of Forthampton Court, Gloucestershire', *Architectural History*, 24 (1981), 92-103 (p. 97).

organization, and the places in childhood where the self blossomed occur, significantly, outside the house. The kitchen is where the boys are called down and told to sit against the wall in complete silence, so the generative properties of a new day and nourishment turn into abstention and self-effacement, just as the daily hour spent in mother's presence in the living room is overcast with the anticipation of expulsion to bed. The instability of home is heightened during the war, when the house, turned into a convalescent hospital for wounded officers, accepted into its bosom death.

Green intends, in other words, for his memories to remain 'some way away from us' (139). The avoidance of the first-person singular pronoun here shows his desire to reach across personal memory and into universal, shared memories. It also may result from confusion about which 'I' these memories belong to, the 'I' writing now or the 'I' who had experienced them? To get too close to memories is, in this sense, a double failure: it discounts what they mean to the 'I' now, which is surely more important than the attempt to 'recreate days that are done' (139), and such memories must be restrained so they 'shall not break on a reader's communion with his own but only remind him by the sound so faint of ours' (139-40).

These ambiguities prevent an introspective *Bildung* because the self cannot be pinned down. Personality is subsumed under institutions, social confrontations, the false expectations one has taken from society, and the inflated view of one's own character. *Party Going*, which was written immediately before *Pack My Bag*, is all about posing, masks, how authenticity is undermined, and the impossibility of

discovering a true self: ““What do we know about anyone?”” Julia asks, ‘thinking of herself’ (434). Its characters are always in a position that is *situational*, responding to stimuli and others. The party goers speak ‘as people do when they are living up to their own character’ (490), which brings to mind Stephen Tennant as a young child, chided by his mother to stop posing but responding, ‘But Mummie, I always pose.’<sup>113</sup> Green too, in *Pack My Bag*, describes himself as posing: ‘I began to dramatize the shock I knew I had had into what I thought it ought to feel like’ (141); ‘I wonder how much boys feel because they know they ought to feel?’ (146).<sup>114</sup> As Raunce in *Loving* notes: ‘But it’s not the truth that matters. It’s what’s believed’ (131).

Furthermore, getting too close to the beliefs of one’s generation, as Green had done in the early twenties, is recognized as an abnegation of the self: ‘The war well won for us it appears we forgot those who had lost their lives and that we sat back like victors ... It seems in a way as though we have been falsified by the turn events have taken’ (205). The belief that ‘we did not have to mourn the dead’ (100) is, for Green, not so much about the war but the death of his brother, Philip, when he was a boy. The writing attempts to grieve for this death since the schoolboy could not:

Some days later I was called into the old devil’s study to be told my brother was dead. It meant absolutely nothing to me at all. He took off his spectacles and became helpless because he minded Philip dying, and I remember being frightened I was not showing enough sorrow. ... I cried because I thought I

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<sup>113</sup> Philip Hoare, *Serious Pleasures: The Life of Stephen Tennant* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1990), p. 12.

<sup>114</sup> In other words, ‘[w]e imagined we were drunk’ (*PMB*, 177).

had to cry, because there had been a disaster and because here I was sitting unfeeling in this school holy of holies, all alone (76).

The trauma of this death is noted in the next lines: ‘I went up to London but the funeral was in the country and I cannot remember going down there or whether it was summer or winter. Everyone was strange and I had a horror of the room where he lay dead as though something alive were in it’ (76). The desire to forget this death surely must have been strong (indeed, the obituary of Green’s father records him as having had two sons, erasing the memory of the dead Philip).<sup>115</sup> Philip’s name is itself a source of trauma: ‘After the funeral I had a great sense of shock whenever Philip’s name was mentioned, and for some months had difficulty in not crying when someone said it out with no warning’ (78). Yet before his death, Philip’s name was a reproach:

But they had great hopes and took me to see my brother’s name in large gold letters on the scholarship board. Everything was lovely until they found I was not even up to the standard of these days, and then the old tyrant did not speak to me for seven months as though I had stolen from him. (15)

While his brother’s name is inscribed in large letters on a wall of accomplishment, Green has, up to this point, abstained from naming himself. When his own name does appear in the text, it is through a schoolmaster, who uses Philip’s name as a reproach: ‘Henry, Philip would never have done that’ (78).

This act of naming by proxy is crucial to understanding the reluctance toward personal possession of events and action in *Pack My Bag*. The memoir’s hesitancy in foregrounding its ostensible subject, the author, is startling, especially since, as Philippe Lejeune argues, ‘the profound subject of the autobiography is the proper

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<sup>115</sup> ‘Mr V.W. Yorke’ (Obituary), *The Times*, 29 November 1957, p. 15.

name.’<sup>116</sup> Yet Green’s name only arises through the discourse of others: a schoolmaster tells him, ‘Once a scout a scout always Henry’ (157); one of the sisters in a neighbouring house tells him, ‘Henry, if you do I shall let you kiss me’ (172); then one of these sisters calls out ‘Henry, Henry’ outside his door at night (174), only to say, ‘Oh Henry you haven’t really, have you?’, in reference to his threat to take off his pajamas if she came in the room (175). In all of these cases, being named by others is being made subordinate, forced to behave in accordance with their wishes instead of one’s own.

Not only is Green’s own name suppressed, the text has a marked aversion to using proper names. Because they are distracting, it is best ‘not to mention names at all’ (83-4). And so his parents are never mentioned by name; his two brothers are named, though only in the sixth chapter; and the public school he attended, Eton, is never named, though he does call school, more universally, a ‘fascist state’ (18) and ‘humane concentration camp’ (89).<sup>117</sup> Geographic spaces, though, are named, and Green takes delight in the euphony of ‘Sarn Hill, Volter’s, Downend, Agborough, The Grove’ (7). In the first chapter, the only single-sentence paragraph about the delight of geographic names: ‘When we went out we could go along Bishop’s Walk or Nabletts Lane, it might be as far as Long Green’ (9). In his walks in these places, he is accompanied by an unnamed ‘blue Persian kitten’ (9). The joy of naming these geographic spaces is another sign of the memoir’s focus not on private, possessed

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<sup>116</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 33.

<sup>117</sup> He does refer to a game that was ‘first played so they say at Eton’ (128) but doesn’t name the school he attended.

experience but on what is common and shared. The focus, in other words, is on village greens instead of Henry Green: these geographic sites are public ways.

Green's memoir attempts to realize Gertrude Stein's ambition of 'everybody's autobiography' by reaching across the exclusivity of generational identity and toward the universal.<sup>118</sup> *Pack My Bag* does not impose a set of personal memories but instead, through its method and slant, draws the reader out into moments of reflection connected to Green but ultimately the reader's own. This, for Green, was the purpose of good prose: 'a long intimacy between strangers with no direct appeal to what both may have known' (84). By getting too personal, prose comes to deaden the reader's imagination: 'You're free to picture what you please ... I've got no hold on your old imagination, not yet I haven't', Edith tells Raunce in *Loving* (173). When Raunce asks her what she means by 'not yet', she responds: 'After we're married I'll see to it that you don't have no imagination. I'll make everything you want of me now so much more than you ever dreamed that you'll be quit imaginin' for the rest of your life' (173). It is by keeping things at a distance that the reader finds life. As the final words of *Pack My Bag* state: 'and for the ten years now we have not had to write because we are man and wife, there was love' (242).

### ***Nothing: The Generational Charge***

Later that week Philip Weatherby and Mary Pomfret were sitting in the downstairs lounge of the same respectable public house off Knightsbridge.

'They all ought to be liquidated,' he said obviously in disgust.

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<sup>118</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 1993 [1937]), p. 4.

‘Who Philip?’  
 ‘Every one of our parents’ generation.’  
 ‘But I love Daddy.’  
 ‘You can’t.’  
 ‘I do, so now you know!’  
 ‘They’re wicked darling,’ he exclaimed. ‘They’ve had two frightful wars they’ve done nothing about except fight in and they’re rotten to the core.’  
 ‘Barring your relations I suppose?’  
 ‘Well Mamma’s a woman. She’s really not to blame. Nevertheless I do include her. Of course she couldn’t manage much about the slaughter. And she can be marvellous at times. Oh I don’t know though. I think I hate them every one.’  
 ‘But why on earth?’  
 ‘I feel they’re against us.’  
 ‘You and me do you mean?’  
 ‘Well yes if you like. They’re so beastly selfish they think of no one and nothing but themselves.’  
 ‘Are you upset about your twenty firster then?’  
 ‘Not really,’ he answered. ‘I wouldn’t’ve had one in any case.’  
 ‘Then what is actually the matter?’  
 There was a long pause.  
 ‘It’s because they’re like rabbits about sex,’ he said at last.  
 -*Nothing* (54)

The conversation quoted above, between Philip Weatherby and Mary Pomfret, is one indication of how the ‘gulf between generations’ is at the forefront of *Nothing* (83). The novel also takes up related themes such as how children are ‘different from their parents’ (14), what it means to be ‘middle age[d]’ (37) when the young think you are a ‘million’ years old (144), and what is ‘out of date’ (bachelor parties, horses, eloping, cheap living in cottages, expensive wedding rings). Yet generational identity in *Nothing* does not showcase the existence of what theorists consider essential to defining a generation, either the ‘same ambitions or hopes’ of a group or the common impact of ‘several decisive years’.<sup>119</sup> Rather, the novel makes generational belonging a term without substantive content, used to either justify one’s own behaviour or to castigate those of others.

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<sup>119</sup> Mentré, *Généralions sociales*, pp. 40-1.

The novel begins with widower John Pomfret recounting the mock marriage ceremony which took place between himself and Penelope, the six year-old daughter of his good friend Jane Weatherby. With a cigar band in an ashtray serving as a ring, Jane married the two with ‘her own remembered version of the [marriage] service’ (10). After the ceremony, John Pomfret ‘asked the child to sit on her husband’s knee’ (10), after which, as he tells the story, ‘a great wail came out with a “Mummy I don’t want,” after which nothing was any use, all had been tears’ (10). The title word used for the first time in the text, it is not so much the marriage that causes little Penelope to cry as the demand to sit on the knee of her new ‘husband’. The conflict is not only literary (Penelope marrying the first suitor she encounters) but also generational. In the ancient world, placing a child upon a man’s knees was a sign of paternity; the Latin *genu* (in French, *genou*) for knee shares a common root with generation (and paternity is the root of generational identity). Green might have been aware of this etymological link; at the very least, a number of his novels have paternity, seduction and recognition scenes revolving around sitting on knees. In *Loving*, Raunce’s attempted seduction of Edith begins by his asking her to ‘[c]ome and sit by father’ (103). In *Doting*, Arthur Middleton accuses his wife, Diana, of ‘sitting’ on the knee of his best friend, Charles Addinsell; she says that she did so in order to get information about Arthur’s affair with Annabel, whose seduction involved her being asked to ‘[c]ome sit on my knee a minute’ (296). Arthur’s response to his wife’s revelation is intriguing: ““But that’s simply disgusting,” the man protested angrily. “And what’s more I don’t recognize my Diana in any of this”” (289). In *Nothing*,



John Pomfret re-enacts the scene with Penelope by telling the story to Liz Jennings, his girlfriend whom he thinks ‘between the two generations’ (70).

This subtle exposition of possible generational conflict in the opening pages becomes more explicit in the scene which concludes the *incipit*, where Philip Weatherby and Mary Pomfret are at a Knightsbridge pub discussing their parents’ generation. Philip is angry because Mary has expressed admiration for his mother’s beauty, the connotation being that she gets ‘so many more offers’, a thought which Philip finds ‘disgusting’ (25). He is incensed at ‘their whole generation’ because, they are ‘absolutely unbridled’ (26). The generational specificity of this behaviour, though, is put into question by Mary announcing that at a party she had gone up to a boy and announced that it was time for bed (26). If anything, Philip’s generational anxieties are largely driven by his own insecurities. We are already told, by his mother no less, that he is ‘old-fashioned’ (20) towards girls; he may not even know ‘the facts of life’ (18). There is an Oedipal moment when, in a later scene with his mother full of talk about ‘your generation’ and ‘my generation’, Philip reproaches her, ‘you look more like a sister than my mother’ (154). The importance of this remark is heightened when considering that the major obstacle to Philip marrying Mary is his fear that she might be his half-sister (because he has reasons to believe that Mary’s father is also his biological father). To have clearly defined blood ties is Philip’s manner of delineating generations. He wants clear frames, but even this concern about getting the facts right about blood ties, as I shall explore in further

depth later in this chapter, showcases an unimaginative mind searching for an easy explanation for personal identity.

The long extract at the start of this section – which comes from the second time Mary and Philip are at the same pub – reveals the slippery nature of generational identity. Philip’s complaint about the elder generation is three-pronged: that they fought (and caused) two world wars; that they are ‘beastly selfish’; and that ‘they’re like rabbits about sex’ (54). He continually redefines his view, shifting tactics when seeing what doesn’t work. He thinks his mother ‘marvellous,’ though, by all accounts, she is the one who best fits his characterization of the elder generation. Rather than establishing a coherent identity, the ‘generation’ cannot be defined. Philip longs for it to mean something, for it to have an essential solidity, if only so that his own identity can be validated. As Noel Annan puts it, ‘The claim of those who pronounce what a generation stands for is ... always suspect and likely to be a piece of special pleading.’<sup>120</sup> Philip wants to see them all ‘liquidated’, no doubt because his mother had just told him, after he had asked if he was his father’s son, that ‘your whole generation’s useless’ (50). He thinks that his government work is ‘making this country a place fit to live in at last’ (44), but at work he is seen ‘handing round the tea and buns’ (37), while Mary is ‘in the office cutting out an article on English cherry blossom for the Japanese’ (49).

The term ‘generation’ is a disruptive word; its use maps closely to the overall conflict levels within the novel, which is formally split into three parts. The

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<sup>120</sup> Noel Annan, “‘Our Age’: Reflections on Three Generations in England”, in *Generations*, ed. by Stephen Graubard (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), pp. 81-109 (p. 82).

middle part has the highest level of conflict in the novel: the engagement between Philip and Mary is contested by their parents and lovers swap musical chairs as Liz Jennings matches up with Richard Abbot. This section is also the one with the most frequent use of the term ‘generation’, with characters either justifying their behaviour as one befitting their generation or charging a different generation with ridiculous or immoral acts and beliefs. In Parts I and III, by contrast, the term ‘generation’ appears in a single scene in each part (26, 154) – and for Part I, it is at the close of the *incipit*, thus effectively laying out the ensuing conflict.

By the novel’s end, though, what belongs to one generation and what belongs to another is confused: ‘now the roles are properly reversed’, Mary says to her father when he tells her of his plans to marry Jane Weatherby (157). The younger generation ends up impotent, unable to speak about bringing children into the world as their plans for the future are cast aside, while the older generation is rejuvenated – ‘my skin is a new woman’s’, Jane Weatherby says (153). But this reversal of social roles and the upside-down quality of contemporary life is only part of the story of *Nothing*. The complexity of the novel comes from its showing the formulaic ways in which individuals construct their identity. Generational identity is a fallback either to justify one’s own behaviour or to criticize another’s. From Jane Weatherby who speaks of ‘those golden wonderful days’ (92) which were ‘tragically sweet’ (105), to Liz Jennings, who adopts as her model ‘you have to look forward, face the future whatever that may bring’ (75), none of the characters is able to position him or herself authentically with regard to time because no one is able to make experience

valuable and sure. Every year, John Pomfret asks Mary if she misses her mother, and every year Mary gave ‘a different answer’ (33).

The novel, though, is not as bleak as this example or its title suggests. If anything, *Nothing* shows that the search for an authentic, grounded self, in either a generation or anything else, is deeply problematic. Liz Jennings falls in love with Richard Abbot because she thinks that ‘it is so rare to find a man who looks through the surface as you can, deep down to what really’s there’ (75). Dick Abbot, though, is a lecherous man who spouts one inanity and worn cliché after another, resting self-satisfied because he has not placed anything but material values on life. If there is a model of identity that the novel proposes, it is not the static idea of generational belonging but an awareness of the constant flux of life. Jane Weatherby states:

Oh but we shall never get at the whole truth. I often think we’re not here below to find that out ever, till I believe the truth’s even stopped having any importance for me in the least. Which is not to say I go about all day telling lies myself, you’re my witness! No I meant generally. (155)

Her name gives us a sense of her approach: she will be like the weather, variable. To create a solid belonging, rooted into the world either through one’s generation or one’s social class, is a greater fiction than the ‘flighty’ ways of a woman who, while deeply inconsistent, can enter into a room ‘like a ship in full sail’ (142), a perfectly appropriate simile for the doting mother of a girl named Penelope.

### **Blood and Belonging**

‘To be of the same blood is to possess the same vital principle, and in this sense all who are of like blood make but one single living being.’<sup>121</sup> Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s analysis of primitive societies helps explain why for most of human history generations were thought to be ineluctably linked to each other: fathering a son is ‘the next link in the golden chain of generations,’ ‘an Increase of your Blood.’<sup>122</sup> In the 1920s, though, generational theorists disconnected the generation from any dependence upon nature. These theories reflected anxiety about the broken-down bond between generations noted at the start of this chapter. Denatured, generations no longer followed upon and depended upon each other *sui generis* but inhabited their own reality.

The literary counterpart to this concern with generational continuity was the renewed interest in the question of literary tradition, spurred by a sense that what had been ‘one of the main achievements of the nineteenth century’, continuity, was being dismantled by modernity.<sup>123</sup> This was famously enunciated by T.S. Eliot in ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1919). Like the generational theorists, Eliot insists that tradition is not natural, it ‘cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor’; ‘historical sense’ is not a civilizational quality but a

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<sup>121</sup> Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Primitives and the Supernatural*, trans. by Lilian A. Clare (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1935), p. 266. Lévy-Bruhl’s thinking about blood owes much to Durkheim’s belief that blood was the ‘common principle ... the soul of the group and of each of its members’. See Émile Durkheim, *Incest: The Nature and Origin of the Taboo*, trans. by Edward Sagarin (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1963 [1897]), pp. 88-9. Frazer also noted in *The Golden Bough* that the taboo against blood spilling onto the ground resided in the ancient belief that ‘the soul is in the blood’; see James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1928), p. 228.

<sup>122</sup> Charles Kingsley to Fanny Kingsley, 7 November 1844; qtd. in Susan Chitty, *The Beast and the Monk: A Life of Charles Kingsley* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), p. 98; W. Knowler, ed., *The Earl of Straford’s Letters and Dispatches*, 2 vols (London 1739), qtd. in Patricia Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2004), p. 114.

<sup>123</sup> T.E. Hulme, ‘Humanism and the Religious Attitude’, in *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. by Herbert Read (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987 [1924]), p. 3.

personal one.<sup>124</sup> In ‘What Is a Classic?’ (1944), Eliot continues his interest in literary tradition by emphasizing how the classic, which for him means only Virgil, serves as a standard-bearer for all other works. Whereas Matthew Arnold called British poetry the ‘great contributory stream to the world-river of poetry’, Eliot speaks of Virgil’s contribution to the ‘blood-stream’ of European literature.<sup>125</sup>

Using blood as a metaphor for belonging, paternity, and filiation was not new, although the development of blood tests in the interwar period changed the meaning of blood: these tests could exclude paternity but not prove it.<sup>126</sup> In this section I consider how Green’s use of blood as a metaphor complicates our understanding of his attitudes towards literary tradition and to families as a natural unit, and thus to generations. The ‘unity of blood upon which kinship depends’, John McLennan’s view of primitive families, is complicated by the number of artificial, non-blood families in Green’s novels. In *Blindness*, both of John Haye’s biological parents are dead and he is raised by his stepmother; the Craigan household in *Living* is not connected by blood ties; in *Caught* young Christopher lives apart from his father in a country house, where his aunt raises him; in *Loving* the child evacuees are said to understand only one type of language, ‘a kind of morse spelt out with a belt on their backsides’ (158); in *Back*, Charley Summers’ believes that ‘blood spoke, or

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<sup>124</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1919), in *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. by Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p. 38.

<sup>125</sup> Matthew Arnold, ‘The Study of Poetry’, in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by R. H. Super, 11 vols (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960-1977), ix, 161; T.S. Eliot, ‘What Is a Classic?’ in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 70.

<sup>126</sup> The metaphor of blood and belonging also had a sinister political history in fascist political thought, most obviously in the blood purity laws of Nazi Germany. See Uli Linke, *Blood and Nation: The European Aesthetics of Race* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 19, 197-8.

called, to blood' (12) but is deaf himself to this calling; and then there are the widowers Richard Roe, Mr Rock, and John Pomfret.<sup>127</sup> The one character with the strongest belief in natural, blood-based families is Philip Weatherby, but not only are his beliefs mocked, but they lead to nothing more significant than frequenting his Uncle Ned's tailor. Green's ambivalence towards blood ties can be metaphorically understood as a proclamation of independence from the blood of tradition. The inheritance of blood leads to disease (*Blindness*) or there is a radical uncertainty about paternity and filiation (*Back and Nothing*); both cases show Green's desire to create a life-blood not dependent upon anterior works but one having a life of its own.

*The Inheritance of Diseased Blood and the Sick Artist*

The diary which begins *Blindness* mentions two stories written by John Haye, one 'all about blood' and the other entitled 'Sonny' (357). The only other writing by John Haye in the novel is the letter which concludes the novel and which connects these two earlier stories: John reveals in the letter that he has suffered 'some sort of a [epileptic] fit', a condition inherited from his father, 'who was liable to them' (504) – the blood of the father has infected the son.

John's epilepsy brings him back into a community of blood: the medieval saint of epileptics was Saint John; also, epilepsy was once referred to as 'the English

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<sup>127</sup> John F. McLennan, *Primitive Marriage: An Inquiry into the Origin of the Form of Capture in Marriage Ceremonies* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1865), p. 151.

malady'.<sup>128</sup> More importantly, it is the only aspect of his family situation that is 'natural': ever since Hippocrates' *On the Sacred Disease*, epilepsy has been considered hereditary through the father's blood, a belief John shares.<sup>129</sup> His biological mother died when he was an infant and little is known of her except that 'she had whistled most beautifully' (441) – the echoes of his dead mother's whistling appear as Joan Entwhistle, the village girl John professes his love to but whom he never truly knows. His stepmother admits that 'I'm not much of a mother to you, I'm afraid', a statement John agrees with, thinking in his mind that 'they were like strangers' (374). This estrangement is even deeper when it comes to his dead father, of whom John asks, 'What was he like?' (370). A military man in India and 'the finest man to hounds in three counties ... the most lovely shot' (370-1), Mrs Haye tells John that 'you're not a bit like the family, though Mabel told me the other day that you are getting Ralph's profile as you grow older, but I can't see it' (372). '[T]he continuous succession of fathers and sons,' Ferdinand Tönnies writes, is essential to consolidating an organic community (*Gemeinschaft*) but also trans-generational inheritance.<sup>130</sup> Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (1901), for instance, is about how 'the perpetuation of the family name was still not assured' because of the

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<sup>128</sup> See George Cheyne, *The English Malady: or, a Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds* (1733); cited in Mervyn J. Eadie and Peter F. Bladin, *A Disease Once Sacred: A History of the Medical Understanding of Epilepsy* (Eastleigh: John Libbey & Company, 2001), p. 41.

<sup>129</sup> Trans. by Francis Adams (<http://www.classics.mit.edu/Hippocrates/sacred.html>). Boerhaave had noted that epilepsy was hereditary, coming from the father; see Owsei Temkin, *The Falling Sickness: A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1945), p 219.

<sup>130</sup> Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society*, trans. and ed. by Charles P. Loomis (New York: Harper & Row, 1957 [1887]), p. 39.



failures of physical generation.<sup>131</sup> But John may be the end of the family line, for ‘he would never marry now ... The place would be sold, the name would die, there was no one, Ralph had been the last’ (387). Before his blindness John was yelled at by his stepmother for not wishing ‘to carry on the house and the traditions’ (397). But the idea of forming a family does not attract John: his children will be books, which is alluded to when Mrs Hays first visits him after his blinding and tells him that she was late coming because she had been visiting ‘Mrs Green’s baby. It’s her first, so she’s making a fuss of it ...’ (368). John realizes that any love with Joan would be doomed; he persists in calling her June and admits, ‘June was an illusion – a lovely one’ (442).

John’s only interest is to become an author, and the epileptic fit seems to confirm this ambition as he becomes a spiritual son of Dostoevsky. Before he was blinded, John wrote in his diary about how Dostoevsky’s ‘epileptic fits which were much the same as visions really’ (363). The phrase raises the possibility that epilepsy will give back John the sight that he has lost, that it will help him develop his artistry. A number of critics have argued that this is the case: Mengham thinks that John’s epileptic fit ‘seems to bring him the power to write’, while North sees a ‘young protagonist acquiring moral authority through physical collapse.’<sup>132</sup> The view that epilepsy was salutary to Dostoevsky’s art, Irina Sirotkina observes, was

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<sup>131</sup> Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks: The Decline of a Family*, trans. by John E. Woods (New York: Vintage, 1993), p. 355.

<sup>132</sup> Mengham, *Idiom of the Time*, p 1; North, *Writing of His Generation*, p. 29.

‘common among late-nineteenth-century critics,’ with Cesare Lombroso calling him the exemplar of the ‘epileptic genius.’<sup>133</sup>

This reading, though, is problematic. Even before the seizure, John proclaims his intention of developing his writing so that it would be ‘very queer, with little fragments of insanity here and there’ (399). His inability to develop a coherent aesthetic is a point that I have already covered, and it seems unlikely that epilepsy will order the confusion of his mind. Moreover, the view of Dostoevsky’s epilepsy as the creative spark to his writing was called into question around the time Green completed *Blindness*. In Sigmund Freud’s ‘Dostoevsky and Parricide’, Freud contests the notion that epilepsy could be an aid to art by arguing that epilepsy was not ‘a single clinical entity’ but a range of symptoms.<sup>134</sup> This was an increasingly common medical view, as Kinnier Wilson’s *Modern Problems in Neurology* (1928) argued that ‘[n]o such disease as epilepsy exists, or can exist.’<sup>135</sup> If epilepsy creates predispositions (symptoms) but not determinate behaviour, then John’s coupling of epilepsy with genius becomes problematic. His own father’s epilepsy did not lead to artistic genius of any sort; Mrs Hays recalls that her late husband ‘even found letter-writing almost impossible’ (481). What the ‘falling sickness’ did, though, was lead to

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<sup>133</sup> Irina Sirotkina, *Diagnosing Literary Genius: A Cultural History of Psychiatry in Russia, 1880-1930* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 70; Cesare Lombroso, *The Man of Genius* (London: Walter Scott, 1891), p. 359. Lombroso notes that the ‘frequent occurrence of epilepsy among the most distinguished of distinguished men can but indicate a greater prevalence of this disease among men of genius than was previously thought possible, and suggests the hypothesis of the epileptoid nature of genius’ (338).

<sup>134</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Dostoevsky and Parricide’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1957-74), XXI, 177-94 (p. 180).

<sup>135</sup> Kinnier Wilson, *Modern Problems in Neurology*, qtd. in Eadie and Bladin, *A Disease Once Sacred*, p. 64.

his death, which came after ‘falling downstairs dead as mutton’ (449). Moreover, the trope of the suffering, diseased artist is overturned in *Blindness* through Mr Entwhistle, who is the only character in the novel who has ‘visions’ (408). Although not said to be epileptic, his visions are thought to be a means of transcending common reality. The drunken pastor’s desire to write ‘the great book that was to link everything into a circle and that would bring him recognition at last’ will never be realised (413). His ‘great sufferings’ (410) do not lead to artistic creation but to ‘pride in the hatred of the world’ (412), which extends to his family: a widower, he takes out his rage in physically abusing his daughter. The scar on Joan’s face, the result of his throwing a bottle at her, leads him to hate her but there is no remorse for the action since ‘it was what a genius would have done’ (414). Mr Entwhistle seems to be a disciple of Raskolnikov; his actions, however immoral, are supremely justified because they emanate from a man who has seen through the world’s superficiality. When Joan cuts herself with a tin-opener, he thinks: ‘Serve her right, now she would get blood-poisoning, her hand would swell and go purple, and it would hurt. They would die in agony together’ (414).

If anything, John’s epilepsy is connected to a period before writing. When talking to Joan about his earlier ambitions, he mentions wanting to lead ‘a public life of the greatest possible brilliance.’ His dream was to become Prime Minister and to address ‘huge meetings which thundered applause. Once, at one of those meetings, a lady became so affected by my words that she had a fit’ (462). He tells Joan that such a life is no longer possible for him and instead ‘I am going to write, yes, to

write ... Life will be clotted and I will dissect it, choosing little bits to analyse. I shall be a great writer. I am sure of it' (463). As he tells Joan, 'I will be a great writer one day, and people will be brought to see the famous blind man who lends people in his books the eyes that he lost ...' (463). The desire to create fits in others has been transferred to unclotting the blood of life: but the blood of life that John finds clotted, at the novel's close, is his own. In both cases – either giving listeners epileptic fits or vision – John tries to exteriorize his affliction, which makes it unlikely that it will be salutary for his own writing.

#### *Unknown Fathers*

If in *Blindness* the inheritance of blood is diseased, both *Back* and *Nothing* are riddles concerning paternity, a topic on which new biological light was shed in the interwar years. The discovery in 1919 that blood groups were hereditary allowed for blood tests to exclude (but not confirm) paternity.<sup>136</sup> By the late 1920s, Germany, Austria, Sweden, and Switzerland, had ordered blood tests in paternity disputes; in Great Britain, the 1939 Bastardy (Blood Tests) Bill allowed blood tests to be entered as evidence in affiliation cases.<sup>137</sup> These tests led to the first hard data on mistaken paternity. In Germany from 1925 to 1929, there was an 8 per cent exclusion rate in

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<sup>136</sup> L Hirszfeld and H Hirszfeld, 'Serological Differences between the Blood of Different Races: The Result of Researches on the Macedonian Front', *Lancet*, 2 (1919), 675-9; see also R.R. Race and Ruth Sanger, *Blood Groups in Man*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1954), pp. 2, 11, 29.

<sup>137</sup> See Report by the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Bastardy (Blood Tests) Bill (H.L.), 13 July 1939; reprinted in David Harley, *Medico-Legal Blood Group Determination: Theory Technique Practice* (London: Heinemann, 1943), pp. 65-6. Also see Alexander Solomon Wiener, *Blood Groups and Blood Transfusion*, 2nd edn (Springfield, IL: C.C. Thomas, 1939). In *The Long Week-End*, the authors note that this law entered the public consciousness at the time; see Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1941), p. 397.

4,500 paternity tests; the number of husbands who were not biological fathers must have been much higher, though, as the figure reflected only paternity disputes that went to court.<sup>138</sup> Uncertainty regarding paternity made its way into a number of literary texts, with Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses* calling paternity ‘a legal fiction’ when discussing Shakespeare’s authorship and Gide’s *The Counterfeiters* (1925) opening with the discovery of the son realizing that he is not his father’s son.<sup>139</sup> The linguist Émile Benveniste demonstrated that *filius* had a certain ‘instability’ compared to *nepos*: the son of a man’s sister is more certainly a blood relative than his own presumed son.<sup>140</sup>

In both *Back* and *Nothing*, the paternity dispute is never resolved. Raising the question of blood ties only to leave them unresolved signals their relative unimportance compared to social bonds and individual belief. That this could occur even when non-resolution threatens to lead to incest shows how blood, for Green, was not primordial but social.

*Back* questions the certainty of blood through a scene of non-recognition in its opening. After Charley Summers is repatriated from a prisoner-of-war camp, he visits a cemetery to find the grave of his dead lover, Rose. A child riding a tricycle – appropriately enough, as Charley with his peg leg has only three limbs – passes by but Charley ‘saw nothing, nothing was brought back. He did not even feel a pang, as

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<sup>138</sup> Philip Levine, *The Use of Blood Tests in Paternity Disputes*, paper read before the Society of Medical Jurisprudence, 8 February 1937, at the New York Academy of Medicine (New York, 1938), consulted at Harvard Law Library, US 988 LEV, p. 8.

<sup>139</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. by Hans Walter Gabler (London: Bodley Head, 1986), p. 170.

<sup>140</sup> Émile Benveniste, *Le Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européens*, 2 vols (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969), I, 236.

well as he might if only he had known' (6). Wandering around the cemetery, Charley doesn't give any further thought to the boy until he runs into an old acquaintance, James Phillips, who was Rose's husband. When James reveals that he is the father of Ridley, Charley is stunned; he comes to wonder whether the boy might be his offspring with Rose instead. Charley desperately wants to see the boy again, 'to look deep in Ridley's eyes as though into a mirror, and catch the small image of himself by which to detect, if he could, a likeness, a something, however false, to tell him he was a father, that Rose lived again, by his agency, in their son' (12).

This moment of non-recognition and then of false recognition is critical to understanding Charley's motivations: 'He was appalled that the first sight of the boy had meant nothing. Because one of the things he had always hung on to was that blood spoke, or called, to blood' (12). The upending of this natural law makes Charley helpless, and throughout the novel Charley is bombarded by other laws of nature that appear suspended or impotent. Rose's father, Mr Grant, tells Charley that 'nature protects us by drawing a curtain, blacks certain things out' (13), but it is precisely this blackout which endangers Charley, for his refusal to confront what has happened to him as a prisoner of war makes him unable to move past the experience. In the course of the same conversation, Mr Grant tells Charley that '[n]ature's cruel, there's no getting away from her laws. She won't let up on the weak, I mean' (13). Rather oblivious of Charley's wooden leg, the statement is thrown into doubt when Mr Grant, who is caring for his ill wife, later falls ill and has to be cared for by his wife, who has recuperated (he ends up dying, his wife calling out to him on his

death-bed to ‘come back’ [186]). James Phillips tells Charley that ‘having children is what we’re here for’ (109), but Ridley is always ‘away, somewhere on his own’ (114). At the novel’s close, the most radical upending of nature occurs when Nancy, in whose arms Charley seeks comfort, tells him that ‘if you live on long enough without a man, you go back to be a virgin’ (205), a statement that eliminates the blood of a ‘deflowering’ (she becomes, in other words, Rose) but also, because she is essentially trying to seduce him with this line, raises the possibility that this blood could flow again in their future offspring. With no laws of nature to trust, mirroring the return ‘back’ into a land whose abbreviations and bureaucracies disorient him, Charley doubts everything to the point that he ‘got so that he did not know what he was about’ (57). He comes to believe that Rose is still alive, a search that also concerns blood: in Germany, where Charley was held a prisoner, *Blut* for blood is closely related to *Blume* for flower and *Blute* for blossom, all stemming from the early Germanic *blodi*, which meant blossom, blooming flower, and blood.

The uncertainty about paternity is doubled in the novel’s translated passage from the purported memoirs of the Marquise de Créqui, a topic that I cover more fully in Chapter Four. The source of the memoir is in dispute within the text (who subscribed to the literary review within which it was published is not clear), and because it is a forgery, the passage lacks an unequivocal father, and thus has no paternity. The passage also contains a brief mention of a case of disputed paternity. While mentioning an aristocratic family ‘descended in a direct line’ (93), there is also an allusion to a ‘case against the Lejeune de la Furjournières’ (103). While

Green's translation does not specify what this means, the memoirs from which he extracted his translation does (Green did not translate a continuous block of text but selected passages from a larger chapter). The Marquise de Créqui's son had a vicious and lengthy lawsuit of usurped identity against a certain le Jeune de la Furjoniere, who claimed that he was part of the Créquy line. The pamphlet war was notorious for a few years in Paris for the vicious attacks both men foisted upon each other. The attorneys for le Jeune de la Furjoniere made the rather whimsical claim, 'Therefore, since there has long been a Créquy that the Marquis de Créquy did not know, and which he ended by admitting to, why cannot there be two?'<sup>141</sup> The Marquis de Créquy, on the other hand, was determined to prove not only that le Jeune's titles and deeds to being part of the Créquy family were false but also 'through his own titles, I will prove that he is not part of the House of Créquy'.<sup>142</sup> The dispute about paternity concerns a desire to prove a negative, while Charley has to prove a positive, that Ridley is his son. His only method of doing so is looking at the boy, but that cannot prove anything, as James Phillips tells him that '[t]here's nothing in faces' (128), a phrase that equally applies to Charley's mistaken quest to find Rose, whom he sees everywhere but never finds.

By the novel's close, though, Charley has largely forgotten about Ridley – his possible paternity is something 'he had not considered in a long while' (202). The

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<sup>141</sup> Maître Debonnieres, *Réponse à l'exposé pour le Comte de Créquy contre le Marquis de Créquy* (Paris: P.G. Simon, 1779), p. 31.

<sup>142</sup> Charles-Marie de Créquy, *Mémoire à consulter, et consultation, Pour Charles-Marie de Créquy, Marquis de Créquy, Chef du Nom & des Armes de Créquy, qui sont d'or au Créquier de gueules; Contre François-Louis-Marin le Jeune de la Furjonniere, Chevalier de l'Ordre de Saint-Louis, soi-disant Comte de Créquy; et contre les Sieurs Le Jeune, ses Freres.* (Paris: L. Cellot, 1780), p. 16.



conversation he has with Nancy in the penultimate section of *Back* concerns the value of transmission, which for many of the characters in the novel is one of the few sure things in life. Although he had started with the belief that ‘blood spoke, or called, to blood’ (12), Charley is now doubtful: ‘A man never knows if the kid is his own, or not’ (203). ‘A wife and kids were not for Charley Summers. He knew that’ (206). Charley sees posterity as doubtful because his value system has come to place priority upon possession. To possess selfishly and for one’s own sake, in one’s own being, is in some ways the response of an amputated man, for no substitute of an ‘aluminium leg’ can make up for the flesh torn away. Coming ‘back’ to England under a ‘repatriation’ scheme is a return to a life and country that he had lost and which he has to repossess. Nancy can take the view that ‘kids are your own flesh and blood’, but those terms are a tearing away of selfhood, not an enhancement of it for Charley (205). He knows very well that just as a prosthetic leg is no substitute for a real one, bringing children into life is not a substitute for living itself.

After his conversation, they walk outside and Ridley passes them, ‘his eyes fixed on Nance’ (207). Charley thinks that Ridley ‘must have thought he was seeing his mother step, in her true colours, out of his father’s micro-films’, which explains why he ‘blushed, blushed a deep scarlet in this snow clear light’ (207). The scene occurs on Christmas Day, which symbolically makes Ridley a kind of virgin birth, a reading set up by Nancy’s earlier claim of being able to go back to a state of virginity (205). The impossibility of being back, though, is surely the novel’s greatest theme, and Nancy’s statement is another manifestation of it. And she won’t remain a self-

styled virgin much longer, as the novel closes with Charles and Nancy in bed. Charley comes to her and ‘buried his face in her side just below the ribs, and bawled like a child. “Rose,” he called out, not knowing he did so, “Rose”’ (208). Only by forgetting about his possible paternity and becoming a child again can Charley’s unconscious come out, as in loving arms he can finally begin to heal.

In *Nothing*, doubtful paternity has an even greater *enjeu*, but it too remains unresolved. Philip Weatherby plans to marry Mary Pomfret but is worried that they might be entering into an incestuous union because there are rumours that he was fathered by John Pomfret, Mary’s father. When Philip bluntly asks his mother, ‘am I Father’s son?’ (49), Jane Weatherby ‘went deep red under the make-up’ but refused to answer, only calling herself ‘your very own mother your flesh and blood’ (49). Simply using ‘the evidence of your own senses’ doesn’t get Philip very far, as ‘[t]here was no resemblance physical or otherwise’ between him and Mary (54). The one person who can clear up this mystery, Arthur Morris, ends up dying of a blood clot before Philip can ask him about the identify of his father. Curiously, John Pomfret has diabetes and during the war had ‘a card ... hung round his neck’ with his blood group on it (23) – information that could be helpful in clearing up some of the mystery of the disputed paternity.

Philip’s belief in blood, though, remains unshaken; he explains that when his younger sister grows older, ‘there’ll be thousands of young men Mamma will have in, all that part of it is in my mother’s blood’ (42). He asks Mary, ‘You don’t believe in blood?’ She responds flippantly, ‘Consanguinity, is there such a word? ... No

more than three types surely? Daddy wore his stamped over a card he hung round his neck during the war on a ribbon he got from me' (23). Philip specifies that he means heredity, to which Mary responds, 'I was taught that the whole question of heredity had been exploded ages back' (23). While Philip also likes to dismiss things that are 'out of date' (53) or went 'out with horses' (87), he remains wedded to a strong belief in family that seems out of place: 'Oh my dear boy,' his mother tells him, 'do rid yourself, oh do, of this family complex!' (155). After listing all the economies that marriage with Mary would entail, she tells him, 'Oh darling aren't you making it all sound rather grim?', to which he responds, 'I think marriage is. We'll have a lot of responsibilities' (101). His desire for family ties are so strong that his mother believes that he feels 'deep down inside him that he must, simply must find a wife so close that the marriage could almost turn out to be incestuous' (59). By the end of the novel, he does not care much whether or not he marries; it is only marriage as an idea which interests him, not the reality of everyday married life.

While the plot of *Nothing* is driven forward by the plans for the double marriage (John Pomfret and Jane Weatherby; Philip Weatherby and Mary Pomfret), uncertain paternity is the undercurrent that threatens to prevent the marriage between Philip and Mary. The novel's formal dependence upon dialogue as opposed to a strong narrator means that there can never be an answer to this question. '[W]e shall never get at the whole truth' (155), Jane Weatherby says, because the characters refuse to 'rake up the past' (89) or do so dreamily, with talk of 'those golden wonderful days' (92). When the principal agents involved, Jane Weatherby and John

Pomfret, are directly asked about what happened, their responses are evasive, denying the charge but ambiguous enough to keep it alive. When Mary goes down to Brighton to confront Jane Weatherby about her dead mother, Jane asks, ‘My dear ... am I supposed to recognize you?’ (45). Because the narrator fails to provide an external perspective to the question, the novel encourages not only continuing doubt about paternity but also questions the importance of the answer. In the broken world portrayed in *Nothing*, where there is little that moves the spirit, endless work for State institutions, and grand deceptions from every character, the real tragedy is the future prospect of the marriage between Philip and Mary. The life of twenty years earlier is so radically removed that whatever happened back then cannot have any influence on the contemporary world the novel portrays: the novel form has to reinvent itself at every turn and stand without a father or mother, ‘our children will just have to work their own lives out ...’ (167).

### **Conclusion**

Green’s link to his generation is not that of a simple reflection. His first novel inaugurates a critique of generational thinking, with John Haye’s potential artistry falling victim to his generation’s newfound visibility in the literary marketplace. In *Nothing*, generational thinking breaks down and is exposed as hollow. The breakdown of generational continuity is most apparent when considering the claims

of blood and belonging across Green's novels, for the transmission of blood is either diseased (*Blindness*) or uncertain (*Back, Nothing*).

This does not mean that the generation is overthrown by Green; that would be too strong a word for what his fiction was attempting. The problem of the generation is that it cannot generate fictions: its connection to social reality is a theoretical construct and not a vital linkage. The imagination of a strong author cannot be like John Haye's, alternating between slavish imitation of past masters and a violent, eccentric cutting free of any ties. What the middle way would be cannot be theoretically resolved; it is the fiction itself that has to situate itself within a literary context while managing to have a life of its own. Green's purpose of thinking through the problems of generations is to understand the relationship of fiction to its time, but in his refraction of what the concept meant, he also is attempting to clear a space for his engagement with those times, on terms that were uniquely his own. In the next chapter, we shall see how this effort manifested itself in perhaps the most vital question for Green's time, the changing British class structure.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CLASS REPRESENTATIONS

Christopher Isherwood's claim that *Living* was 'the best proletarian novel ever written' received a stony reply from his good friend Henry Green: 'I don't know that he [Isherwood] ever worked in a factory.'<sup>1</sup> This dismissal implies that the novel should be judged by its honest portrayal of working-class life, which could only come from inside the whale, after 'twenty-four months' of 'a forty-eight hour week first in the stores, then as a pattern maker, then in the ironfoundry, in the brassfoundry, and finally as a coppersmith' (*PMB*, 208, 232). If that was Green's metric for evaluating *Living*, then perhaps the sincerest compliment ever paid was a condemnation in Kharkov. At the Second International Conference of Revolutionary and Proletarian Writers in 1930, the working-class writer Harold Heslop observed:

A new school of writers has branched off from the old. I speak of such writers as Richard Aldington, Rhys Davies, Henry Green, James Hanley ... These people are products of the new phase of modern capitalism in Britain. They are creatures of its vast and implacable contradictions. They are influenced by such writers as James Joyce and the late D.H. Lawrence. Some of these writers, especially James Hanley and Henry Green, are of proletarian stock.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Green, 'The Art of Fiction', in *Surviving*, p. 247.

<sup>2</sup> Qtd. in H. Gustav Klaus, *The Literature of Labour: Two Hundred Years of Working-Class Writing* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1985), p. 100. On Heslop's time in Kharkov, see Andy Croft, "'Proletarian' Writers in Britain and America', *Labour History Review*, 59 (1994), 81-3 (p. 81).

Given the hard line the literary left took against Joyce (Prince Mirsky called him the figurehead of the ‘cosmopolitan parasitic bourgeoisie’, while Karl Radek characterized his work as ‘[a] heap of dung, crawling with worms, photographed by a cinema apparatus through a microscope’) as well as the blood and soil fixations of Lawrence, Heslop meant to smear this ‘new school’.<sup>3</sup> But to be called ‘of proletarian stock’ by a Durham miner’s son, whose first novel was published in the Soviet Union, was an unintended attestation of *Living*’s proletarianism.

The novel is a wide survey of working-class life, following an ensemble cast of workers, neighbours, and families linked to the Dupret factory. Two characters stand out: Dick Dupret, the son of the factory’s owner, and Lily Gates, a young woman who dreams of babies and running away. Dick is a detached young man often seen sitting on a sofa, picking his nose under the cover of an appointment book. He wants a greater role in the firm, but that only comes to him when his father dies – and when he arrives as its head, there is little he can do, like Larkin’s character in ‘Livings’:

... I drowse  
 Between ex-Army sheets, wondering why  
 I think it’s worthwhile coming. Father’s dead:  
 He used to, but the business now is mine.  
 It’s time for a change, in nineteen twenty-nine.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> D.S. Mirsky, ‘James Joyce’, *International Literature*, 1.7 (April 1934), 92-102 (p. 102); Karl Radek, ‘Contemporary World Literature and the Tasks of Proletarian Art’, in *Problems of Soviet Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers’ Congress*, ed. by H.G. Scott (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979 [1935]), pp. 71-162 (p. 153).

<sup>4</sup> There is a strong case for linking Larkin’s poem to *Living*: the date mentioned in the poem is the same as *Living*’s publication year, the son’s place in the family business is exactly the same in both, both have provincial themes and displacement as well as strong elements of class transgression, the ‘gold river’ in Larkin suggests Dick Dupret’s descriptive possession of the Thames when he sees ‘yellow leaves’ floating on it, and the catalogue of events in life in Larkin’s poem – ‘Births, deaths. For sale. Police court. Motor spares’ – matches Dick’s observations when walking through Bridesley,

Lily Gates also wants a job, but for her it is a question of economic need as well as self-assertion against the constraints of domestic life. The men of her house, her father and Mr Craigan, will not hear of a woman working for a wage. They would like to see her married to Jim Dale, but her affections are for Bert Jones, whose only thought is to leave Birmingham, ‘a poor sodding place for a poor bleeder’ (*Living*, 223). She decides to run away with Bert to Canada, but they only get to Liverpool, where he ends up leaving her. At the novel’s close, she returns to Birmingham.

While modernist in style and form, *Living* is infused, as I shall argue, with localism in atmosphere, character and language. But within *Living*’s strong localism there remains the pull of the outside – in some way, the novel mirrors Green’s own position, attempting to be part of the community he is describing but also aware of the attractions of another type of life. This makes the proletarianism of *Living* problematic if one considers a question once posed by Lukács: ‘How could anyone, born a bourgeois, even conceive of the idea that he might live otherwise than as a bourgeois?’<sup>5</sup>

Replacing ‘live’ with ‘write’ within Lukács’s question would plot out the general position of the interwar British literary left:

Bourgeois writers are so entirely within the bourgeoisie that they cannot even for a second get outside and look back at the system or the class as a whole. They reflect the characteristics of their epoch automatically, unconsciously,

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with his feeling that there is ‘only marriage and growing old’ (329). Larkin at this time was writing a series of poems with gerund titles (‘Going, Going’ and ‘The Building’), and Green’s use of gerund titles was one of his defining features. Larkin also admitted that he admired Green, whom he would have read in the late 1940s, when Larkin was still a novelist and Green was among the established figures of the form; see Andrew Motion, *Philip Larkin: A Writer’s Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), p. 160.

<sup>5</sup> Lukács, ‘The Bourgeois Way of Life and Art for Art’s Sake’, p. 55.



and therefore with perfect fidelity. This is what we mean when we say that they are bourgeois artists.<sup>6</sup>

Even if John Strachey's 'we' and 'they' is problematic (he was educated, like Green, at Eton and Magdalen College, Oxford, and his father edited the *Spectator* for nearly four decades), his view on the determinate importance of what Terry Eagleton called the 'class-position or the class-situation of the author' held sway over large swathes of the literary establishment.<sup>7</sup> The editor of *The Modern Quarterly*, V.F. Calverton, argued in 1925 that literary texts are 'the outgrowths of the social system in which they have their being' ('Shakespeare did nothing more than represent the esthetic conceptions of his period') and that, in this time of class upheaval, 'the fading bourgeois' could produce only 'anemic art'.<sup>8</sup> Christopher Caudwell, perhaps the period's most astute theorist of proletarian fiction, argued that bourgeois artists could take up three possible positions with respect to the working class: opposition, alliance (fellow travellers), or assimilation. Only the latter was salutary:

Our demand—that your art should be proletarian—is *not* a demand that you apply dogmatic categories and Marxist phrases to art. To do so would be bourgeois. We ask that you should *really* live in the new world and not leave your soul behind in the past. It is your artists's soul for which we value you; and how can your soul be in the new world if your art is bourgeois? We shall know that this transition has taken place when your art has become *living*; then it will be proletarian. Then we shall cease to criticise it for its deadness.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John Strachey, 'Fascism and Culture', *International Literature*, 1.10 (September 1934), 90-110 (p. 97).

<sup>7</sup> Terry Eagleton, 'Proletarian Literature', in *English Literature and the Working Class*, ed. by Francisco García Tortosa and Ramón López Ortega (Sevilla: Publicaciones Universidad Sevilla, 1980), pp. 5-10 (p. 9, emphasis original).

<sup>8</sup> V.F. Calverton, *The Newer Spirit: A Sociological Criticism of Literature* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1925), pp. 21, 29-30, 141.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Caudwell, *Illusion and Reality: A Study of the Sources of Poetry* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1946), pp. 288-9 (emphasis original).

Fellow travellers were, of course, roundly criticized. As one critic in *Scrutiny*, hardly an outpost of proletarianism, put it in a review of Cecil Day Lewis's poetry, 'The Old Boy may have gone Left, but he remains true at heart to the Old School.'<sup>10</sup> Wyndham Lewis bemoaned the "“revolutionary” High-Bohemia of the Ritzes and Rivas' slumming it.<sup>11</sup>

Most bourgeois artists, though, saw assimilation as a difficult course. Stephen Spender felt that writers would commit 'literary suicide' if they 'cut themselves off from the roots of their own [class] sensibility'.<sup>12</sup> Edward Upward observed, from personal experience, that

[g]oing over to practical socialism is not so easy for a writer. ... He is aware that it will involve him in extra work other than imaginative writing, and that this will come upon him at a time when, having abandoned his former style of writing, he most needs to give all his energy to creating a new style. He is aware also that this work may in certain circumstances stop him writing altogether.<sup>13</sup>

These concerns are apt for Green, who became an entirely different artist through *Living*. And the ominous implication of ceasing to write cannot be dismissed; the weakening of class as a recognisable entity in Britain, I will argue, was a major reason for Green's premature silence because it denied him one of the structural and thematic foundations of his work.

I shall begin by arguing that in *Living* Green redefined his understanding of the novel to arrive at his mature poetics – that there are twenty-one chapters in the

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<sup>10</sup> John Speirs, 'Recent Verse', *Scrutiny*, 4.2 (September 1935), 195-9 (p. 198).

<sup>11</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *The Enemy*, 1 (1927), p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Spender, 'The Left-Wing Orthodoxy', *New Verse*, 31-2 (Autumn 1938), 12-6 (p. 13). See also his *The Destructive Element: A Study of Modern Writers and Beliefs* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), p. 234, for a less polemical formulation.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Upward, 'A Marxist Interpretation of Literature', in *The Mind in Chains: Socialism and the Cultural Revolution*, ed. by C. Day Lewis (London: Muller, 1938), pp. 41-55 (p. 53).

novel is a striking coincidence. I shall then examine how *Living* appeared as proletarian to Heslop and Walter Allen, a working-class native of Birmingham who considered it ‘the best English novel of factory life’ and who included Green in his 1936 BBC Midlands Region radio series on Midlands writers.<sup>14</sup> To do this, I begin by contrasting *Living* with the prevailing theory of realism in interwar working-class literary criticism and with three working-class texts, Robert Tressell’s *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914), Walter Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole* (1933) and George Orwell’s *Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). These models, I argue, fail to artistically engage proletarian culture; rather than creating an alternative aesthetic, they rely upon the dominant middle-class ideology and audience of the novel form. Green, though, abandoned traditional novelistic practices because of their class bias. His modifications of narrative presence, structure, and dialogue, are pivotal to an understanding of his more successful handling of proletarian culture. This experimentation, though, was not an escape from working-class reality. While the prevailing scholarly debate about *Living* is almost exclusively centred on its formal and linguistic qualities, I argue that the novel was a writing of Birmingham working-class life.<sup>15</sup> While seemingly timeless in its presentation – ‘And now time is passing’ (266) is a formula, without further delineation, used to introduce several scenes – *Living* is intimately linked to the local conditions of its time. I argue that Green’s

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<sup>14</sup> Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream: The English and American Novel from the Twenties to Our Time* (London: Phoenix House, 1964), p. 214. The other three writers in Allen’s radio series were Auden, Day-Lewis, and John Hampson.

<sup>15</sup> Writing in 1984, North observes that ‘[a]lmost all the critical attention devoted to *Living* has been concentrated on [its] style ....’ See his *Writing of the Generation*, p. 56. For an attempt at a more historically contextualized reading of the novel’s use of Birmingham working-class culture, see my ‘Fictions of Class and Community in Henry Green’s *Living*’, *Studies in the Novel*, 42 (2010), 321-39.

presentation of Birmingham is cultural, not physical; his was an internal history of the city and its working-class inhabitants.

### **‘A mouthbreather with a silver spoon’: Class in Green’s fiction**

Although David Lodge lists *Living* among the best five novels ever written dealing with class, it has not figured prominently in discussions of British proletarian fiction.<sup>16</sup> Richard Jacobs observes that ‘ungeneralisable regionalism, working-class lives, and experimental language ... ensure that *Living* has only had a tangential place in the canon.’<sup>17</sup> Tangential overstates the case: the most recent monographs on working-class fiction (Fox, Haywood, Kirk, Knapp, and Shiach) do not mention Green.<sup>18</sup> No doubt some embarrassment attends putting in the working-class canon an aristocrat captain of industry who travelled to Moscow with a briefcase stuffed with contracts, not a Party membership card.

There are only two articles on class in Green’s work. Both rely upon mistaken or questionable biographical claims to forward their argument that his class position barred him from writing truthfully about the working-class. While these works are labelled as new bottles by being positioned within cultural studies or

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<sup>16</sup> David Lodge, ‘Five Best’, *Wall Street Journal*, 20 September 2008, p. W8.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Jacobs, *A Beginner’s Guide to Critical Reading: An Anthology of Literary Texts* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 390.

<sup>18</sup> Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction: From Chartism to Trainspotting* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1997); John Kirk, *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working Class* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003); James F. Knapp, *Literary Modernism and the Transformation of Work* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988); and Morag Shiach, *Modernism, Labour and Selfhood in British Literature and Culture, 1890-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

psychoanalysis, they serve out the same old wine, the view that a text indubitably reflects its author's class. Peter Hitchcock thinks that Green went to save the family factory (labouring on the floor would not do that), criticizes *Living* for not mentioning the General Strike (it does), and dismisses the novel's 'Brummagen' speech as 'more a product of the streets below ... London offices' (a claim contested by Birmingham native Walter Allen, who called the novel's dialect accurate).<sup>19</sup> Carol A. Wipf-Miller observes that Green's 'going over' came with a 'return ticket' (which is true but irrelevant to the novel).<sup>20</sup> One sign of the carelessness within the extant criticism is the frequent attribution of the Hogarth Press as the original publisher of *Living*.<sup>21</sup> This error shows critics unconsciously placing questions of style, symbolism, and form above class in their treatment of the novel; it also reveals how they overlook *Living*'s context and history.

Yet it was by encountering class difference, I suggest, that Green arrived at his mature poetics. *Blindness* was in many ways a traditional novel, with conventional language, a classical tripartite structure, and a common theme of a budding artist. In itself, his first novel did not contain the germs of his future development; one could not predict from it, at any rate, Green's future experimentation with the novel form. *Living*, though, laid the foundation for Green's

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<sup>19</sup> Hitchcock, 'Passing', p 20; Allen, *Tradition and Dream*, p. 216.

<sup>20</sup> Wipf-Miller, 'Fictions of "Going Over"', p. 141. Ramon López Ortega, while generally sympathetic to *Living*, mistakenly writes that Green's experience in the factory occurred 'during one of his vacations'; see his 'The British Novel of the 1930's and the Working Class: Notes for an Introduction', in *English Literature and the Working Class*, op. cit., pp 95-114 (p. 101).

<sup>21</sup> The 1993 Penguin omnibus edition, for instance, states that *Living* was first published in Great Britain by the Hogarth Press. It was published, in fact, by J.M. Dent in 1929; there were reprints by the Hogarth Press in 1948 and 1953, after Green had purchased his backlist from Dent. The frequency with which the 1929 Hogarth Press 'edition' is cited is discussed in William M. Harrison, 'A Hogarth "Ghost" of Sorts: Henry Green's *Living*', *ANQ*, 16 (2003), 51-4.

formal and linguistic experimentation. An overriding concern with class, as both a theme and formal element, is essential in explaining this change. When class became less finely differentiated, as happened in post-war Britain, Green lost the vital animating principle of his fiction, which helps explain his premature silence.

*The Primacy of Living*

After the success of *Blindness*, Green frequented Lady Ottoline Morrell's Garsington salon. He was a favourite of the grand dame, who thought that he was 'the most interesting writer of his generation.'<sup>22</sup> For a writer of his age, education, and social class, becoming acquainted with writers like Lawrence, Eliot and Forster would have been attractive. Edward Garnett wanted Green's next novel to be a light, upper-class comedy, so consorting with those writers and the bohemian aristocrats surrounding them would have provided good material. Green, though, remained resolutely independent of the 'coterie spirit' found at Garsington or Bloomsbury.<sup>23</sup> After *Blindness* he worked on no less than four different projects: the unfinished 'Mood', a work heavily influenced by Woolf; a novel called 'Terminus' or 'Bank Holiday', which was the germ for *Party Going*; a series of short stories that his publisher, Dent, rejected; and *Living*.

To characterize this period as one of experimentation is correct but understates its importance: Green later said that he was plagued by a deep sense of

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<sup>22</sup> Miranda Seymour, *Ottoline Morrell: Life on the Grand Scale* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), p. 409. See also Kohlmann, 'The Heritage of Symbolism', pp. 1191-2, and Janet Lyon, 'Sociability in the Metropole: Modernism's Bohemian Salons', *ELH*, 76 (2009), 687-711.

<sup>23</sup> A.C. Ward, *The Nineteen-Twenties: Literature and Ideas in the Post-War Decade* (London: Methuen, 1930), p. 43.

worthlessness and futility, approaching madness (*PMB*, 209). To get his life back on track meant more than writing literature. His crisis was only resolved by a ‘self-imposed exile’ on the factory floor of his family’s Birmingham works.<sup>24</sup> After completing *Living*, he wrote Roy Harrod: ‘My book is I think rather good this time, 50% better than the last one. It’s absolutely written in my blood, looking back on it, & going down to the factory again, I can’t see how it was done.’<sup>25</sup>

A deep concern with social class helps explain this change. The shame of being unable ‘to look a labourer in the eye’ (*PMB*, 230) afflicted Green and many of his well-off contemporaries – Cecil Day Lewis asked, ‘Yes, why do we all, seeing a Red, feel small?’<sup>26</sup> The 1926 General Strike was the first major engagement for the age group which had been too young to take part in the Great War. The *Cherwell*’s attitude towards the strike was shrill:

It is the security of our country, as the last election showed. Its advantages are such as we need most at this time, steadiness and coolness; for those hotheads, who from beneath its solid shelter, scream aloud of revolution and reprisal, are unworthy recipients of its hospitality, and should be thrust with the Bolsheviks and Communists into the outer darkness that awaits prophets of fear.<sup>27</sup>

The call to action was heard. Robert Byron, who was in Athens at the time, remembers receiving a number of ‘wild letters from Oxford describing how everyone has gone down in order to handle fish.’<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Green to Harrod, 7 September 1928 (HG-RH correspondence, British Library), folio 84.

<sup>25</sup> Green to Harrod, May 1929 (HG-RH correspondence, BL), folio 94.

<sup>26</sup> This line appeared in ‘A Time to Dance’ but was later excised; see Albert Gelpi, *Living in Time: The Poetry of C. Day Lewis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 48.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Editorial’, *Cherwell*, 8 May 1926, p. 51.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Byron to his mother, 19 May 1926, in *Letters Home*, ed. by Lucy Butler (London: John Murray, 1991), p. 63.

Green's behaviour during the General Strike was confused. He left Oxford, where he and his friends 'played at being gentlemen' (*PMB*, 204), and went home to Forthampton Court.<sup>29</sup> His parents away, he was content to eat strawberries, only to be rung up by a neighbour, who insisted that he do his bit against the strike. Flustered, he agreed, and went to Avonmouth to unload bananas, only to be stopped – according to his own account – by authorities who thought him a stow-away.<sup>30</sup> This experience left a deep mark. In Green's environment, there was no recognized way for the upper class to interact with the working class beyond the master-servant relationship. Even though a kind of levelling was beginning to be felt, how far it would go and what it would mean was unknown, even feared as there appeared, for the first time in English history, people of 'indeterminate social class.'<sup>31</sup> Green's choice to work on the factory floor and then in industrial management was, given his privileged background, unusual.<sup>32</sup>

Without his move to Birmingham, it is not simply that Green would have lacked the 'material' to write *Living*; he neither would have seen its necessity nor the way forward. While modernism is full of geographic displacements reinvigorating art, Green's case is peculiar because *Living* is an evocation of strangeness

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<sup>29</sup> Green's phrase brings to mind Robert Graves's idea that elite institutions allowed him 'to masquerade as a gentleman'; see his *Good-bye to All That*, 2nd rev edn (New York: Doubleday, 1985 [1929]), p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> Treglown, *Romancing*, p. 62.

<sup>31</sup> George Orwell, 'The Lion and the Unicorn' (1941), in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. by Peter Davison, 20 vols (London: Secker & Warburg, 1997-98), XII, 391-434 (p. 408). Hereafter cited as *CWGO*.

<sup>32</sup> In a study of occupational preferences among public schoolboys, Ian Weinberg notes that '[a] career in commerce or finance was attractive as long as this did not involve any kind of industrial or factory management'. See Ian Weinberg, 'The Occupational Aspirations of British Public Schoolboys', *School Review*, 74 (1966), 265-282 (p. 266).



encountered rather than a rewriting of what was left behind (which is arguably the case for Anderson, Eliot, Hemingway and Joyce, among others). Confronted with a new type of life, one that ‘I did not know but feared’ (*PMB*, 231), he worked through a number of novelistic assumptions about perspective, structure, and language. Compared to *Blindness*, his second novel displays a radical reorientation in what the novel means and how it communicates. The most important problem Green faced was the connection between literature and life. After the Society of Arts at Eton and the aesthetes at Oxford, he was confronted by people who did not value ‘that overblown trumpet,’ literature (*PMB*, 234). He was in a city far from the high life of the capital; when Evelyn Waugh visited Birmingham in 1925, he called it ‘a disgusting town with villas and slums and ready-made clothes shops and Chambers of Commerce.’<sup>33</sup> Removed from a familiar, comfortable environment and immersed into an alien culture, it was imperative that the novel be more finely attuned to the different needs and communities of society, and in *Living Green* established, despite being only twenty-four years of age, his mature poetics.

#### *Class Concerns across Green’s Fiction*

If Green is now celebrated as one of the most gifted writers of dialogue, Frank Kermode notes that it is in a particular sphere, as ‘the greatest English master of working-class speech.’<sup>34</sup> Class, and especially sympathy for the working class, set Green apart from many of his contemporaries. In 1931 R.H. Tawney called

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<sup>33</sup> Waugh, *Diaries*, 11 September 1925, p. 220.

<sup>34</sup> Frank Kermode, *The Art of Telling: Essays on Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 88.

‘indifference to inequality ... a national characteristic ... a common temper and habit of mind.’<sup>35</sup> John Carey has persuasively argued that many modernist writers saw the working class as a threat to civilised values and high culture.<sup>36</sup> In *Howards End* (1910), Mr Wilcox, who represents the solid values of traditional England, believes that inequality is a natural law, almost Biblically-ordained: ‘there are just rich and poor, as there always have been and always will be.’<sup>37</sup> While Forster’s novel attempts to cross that divide, Leonard Bast’s effort to better himself is doomed from the start and culminates in his death; had he stayed put in the countryside where he was from, the novel implies, his tragedy could have been avoided. D.H. Lawrence, though an inspiration for working-class authors in the period, was startlingly reactionary in his fiction, believing in nobility of the spirit, and in his own life hankered after titled aristocracy.<sup>38</sup>

Surveying Green’s novels shows how important class was to his work. One can begin with the title pages: the aristocratic ‘Yorke’ is not the artistic ‘Michaelis’, one of the first pen names he considered. Instead, it is ‘Green’, a name conjuring up spring’s pastoral communalism and shared public spaces. This name was also, and this has not been noted, perhaps the most common surname in the locality where he grew up: in the Tewkesbury Abbey memorial for fallen soldiers in the Great War, seventeen Greens are listed, six more than the second-most frequent surname.

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<sup>35</sup> R.H. Tawney, *Equality* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931), p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1890-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> E.M. Forster, *Howards End* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987 [1910]), p. 193.

<sup>38</sup> ‘I would give a great deal to have been born an aristocrat.’ D.H. Lawrence to Lady Ottoline Morrell, 11? February 1915, in *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, ed. by James T. Boulton, 8 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979-2000), II, 281.

Beyond the choice of pseudonym, class was a dominant theme in Green's novels. In *Blindness* the budding romance between John Haye and June Entwhistle is pronounced a 'sacrilege' by the boy's stepmother and nanny, who fear 'the shame on the village and on the house' of mixing social classes (450). Certain professions are unsuitable for John because they do not square with the expectations of his class background: 'One has one's duty, you know; born into a certain position and so forth', says a character in Nancy Mitford's Scottish estate novel, *Highland Fling* (1931).<sup>39</sup> Mrs Haye wants John to get married so that he could continue the family line, although his blindness has jeopardized that. It has also undermined his future earnings, which means that he will not be able to maintain the country estate, whose expenses Mrs Haye is struggling to pay. Her moving the family to London was a common occurrence in the 1920s: the 'impoverished aristocracy', Ralph Nevill explained, could not afford to continue their old way of life and were beginning to think of careers in London for their children:

[T]he wise landowner, perceiving that his successor will be unable to live on the family estate unless he makes a good income for himself, educates his heir to fit him for business pursuits likely to yield a fair return. The serious interests of the latter's life will not, like that of his forefathers, be connected with the countryside, but with London, where his income will be made.<sup>40</sup>

*Party Going*, with its glittering Mayfair characters, appears to be a novel entirely about the wealthy: '[I]t is only the rich', the narrator intervenes to say, 'who rule worlds such as we describe' (431). The novel is structured by a geographic separation between social classes: the wealthy party goers are inside a terminus hotel

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<sup>39</sup> Nancy Mitford, *Highland Fling* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975 [1931]), p. 29.

<sup>40</sup> Ralph Nevill, *English Country House Life* (London: Methuen, 1925), p. 39.

whose barricaded doors keep the masses outside. Given its setting and characters, Green's novel appears to be part of the Mayfair novel sub-genre, which underwent a revival in the interwar years with the emergence of the Bright Young People.<sup>41</sup> After the publication of Michael Arlen's *May Fair* (1925), bookshops and railway stalls were stocked with *Romances of Mayfair* (1925), *Delilah of Mayfair* (1926), *The Mayfair Mystery* (1927), *Mayfair Lou* (1928), *Once in Mayfair* (1929), *Vanity in Mayfair* (1929), *A Modern Vanity Fair* (1931), Barbara Cartland's *A Virgin in Mayfair* (1932), *Cinderella in Mayfair* (1934), and Ivor Novello's *Murder in Mayfair* (1935).<sup>42</sup> One publisher, Laurie, began a 'Sinners of Mayfair' series. Unsurprisingly, class conservatism and snobbery were defining features of these Mayfair novels. John Brandon's *Murder in Mayfair* (1934), in a nod to *Vanity Fair: A Story without a Hero*, was subtitled *A Story without a Moral*; the *TLS* found otherwise in the efforts of its protagonist 'to make London safe for aristocracy.'<sup>43</sup> In Andrew Soutar's *Delilah of Mayfair* (1936), Mr Cuthbert Marcus Swete is so famous he 'hadn't the need of a publicity agent' and so wealthy that he could spend five thousand on a ball; yet the narrator exploits his uncertain 'pedigree' to highlight the social levelling of Mayfair in this period.<sup>44</sup> Two of the period's more memorable Mayfair novels, Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930) and Anthony Powell's *Afternoon Men* (1931), shared in this snobbery. In *Vile Bodies*, the aristocracy tries to ingratiate itself with the lower

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<sup>41</sup> See D.J. Taylor, *Bright Young People: The Rise and Fall of a Generation: 1918-1940* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> Michael Arlen, *May Fair* (New York: Doran, 1925). Arlen's story 'Where the Pigeons Come to Die' is echoed in the opening of *Party Going*, where a dead pigeon falls at the feet of Miss Fellowes.

<sup>43</sup> *TLS*, 24 May 1934, p. 377.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Soutar, *Delilah of Mayfair* (London: Hutchinson, 1936), pp. 9-11.

classes: the eighth ‘Earl of Balcairn, Viscount Erdinge, Baron Cairn of Balcairn, Red Knight of Lancaster, Count of the Holy Roman Empire and Chenonceaux Herald to the Duchy of Aquitaine’ trades his titles for ‘Mr Chatterbox’.<sup>45</sup> In *Afternoon Men*, the working class is physically dangerous: club doormen are ‘[t]wo Shakespearian murderers, minor thugs from one of the doubtfully ascribed plays’; another doorman is ‘an ape-faced dotard in uniform’; and waiters have faces ‘furrowed with the minor dishonesties of uncounted years’.<sup>46</sup>

Yet *Party Going* differs from other period Mayfair texts by its sympathetic portrayal of the working-class. This is not an accepted view among critics. Michael North claims that the novel paints a ‘horrible picture of the crowd’.<sup>47</sup> The novel’s ‘terrifying’ portrait of the crowd, Marina Mackay argues, can be traced back to ‘the high modernist fascination with the crowd’ – a fascination that was, as John Carey has persuasively argued, one of repulsion.<sup>48</sup> The crowd in *Party Going*, in other words, is seen as a ‘threat’, something ‘strange and grotesque’.<sup>49</sup> Yet these readings overlook how within Green’s novel the party goers’ fear of the mass is a projection of their greatest fear, anonymity: indistinguishable are these ‘thousands of Smiths, thousands of Alberts, hundreds of Mary’ (466). The mass is hardly a unified body when looked at from inside: ‘being in it, how was it possible for them to view themselves as part of that vast assembly for even when they had tried singing they

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<sup>45</sup> Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, p. 61.

<sup>46</sup> Anthony Powell, *Afternoon Men* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963 [1931]), pp. 13, 191, 88.

<sup>47</sup> North, *Writing of His Generation*, p. 97. North states that the novel’s portrait of the crowd brings to mind Eliot’s *The Waste Land*: ‘Unreal City, | Under the brown fog of a winter dawn, | A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, | I had not thought death had undone so many’ (lines 60-3).

<sup>48</sup> Mackay, *Modernism and World War II*, p. 94.

<sup>49</sup> Mackay, ‘Going Nowhere in Late Modernist London’, p. 1603; MacDermott, *Convergence*, p. 75.

had only heard those next to them; it was impossible to tell if all had joined ...' (496). The men in the crowds, just like the male partygoers, 'searched round and about picking and choosing' the most beautiful women to speak to, 'although they had wifey and the couple of kids at home' (496). The crowd has a 'boisterous good humour' and there is communal singing (467). Before it disperses, Green gives it a kind of elegy:

They were like ruins in the wet, places that is where life has been, palaces, abbeys, cathedrals, throne rooms, pantries, cast aside and tumbled down with no immediate life and with what used to be in them lost rather than hidden now the roof has fallen in. Ruins that is not of their suburban homes for they had hearts, and feelings to dream, and hearts to make up what they did not like into other things. But ruins, for life in such circumstances was only possible because it would not last, only endurable because it had broken down and as it lasted and became more desolate and wet so, as it seemed more likely to be permanent, at least for an evening, they grew restive. (497)

The Englishness of the description – abbeys, cathedrals, throne rooms, pantries – becomes a key motif towards the novel's close, as the mass does not erupt into violence but quietly breaks up. In its double usage of 'hearts' – from within the mass as opposed to the Isherwoodesque aerial shots that dominated the novel's opening – Green gives the mass a sympathetic imaginative power that Mayfair novels of the time denied it. If anything, the mass is likely to be a victim of future events: 'What targets ... what targets for a bomb' (483), an unnamed man in the crowd remarks.

In Green's wartime writings, class upheaval was a constant theme. *Pack My Bag* begins by positioning its subject's class: 'I was born a mouthbreather with a silver spoon' (1). This asphyxiating origin is contrasted to the work's end point: 'The moment I left Oxford to go to Birmingham was the bridge from what had been into

what is so much a part of my life now' (232). In *Caught*, Richard Roe is set apart from the diverse working-class members of the fire service, yet camaraderie between social classes helps him overcome his mental imbalances. The war's levelling of social class is not complete for Pye, though. Coming from the rank and file of the London Fire Service, the need for officers leads to his rapid – and probably unmerited promotion – to station chief, overseeing men from the A.F.S., which was, as contemporary reports indicate, 'composed of men drawn from all classes'.<sup>50</sup> Pye cannot summon the authority he feels this role requires of him. He dwells on how his subordinates are better-educated than him, a particularly common situation during the war, as both the Chief of Fire Staff and Inspector-in-Chief Fire Services, Aylmer Firebrace, and the General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, John Horner, recalled.<sup>51</sup> There is no such class deference of inferiority in *Loving*, which is marked by its close, human attention to domestic servants who have taken control of the house. The novel is a vivid portrait of a disintegrating class system, the land-owners given the dubious and transient name Tennant. If, for 'the ruling classes it was invariably the country house that was home', Green's novel shows the estate falling

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<sup>50</sup> Harold Bevir, *The Auxiliary Fire Service and Its Organisation* (London: National Fire Brigades Association, 1940), p. 23.

<sup>51</sup> Aylmer Firebrace, *Fire Service Memories* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1949), p. 153; John Horner, 'Recollections of a General Secretary', in *Forged in Fire: The History of the Fire Brigades Union*, ed. by Victor Bailey (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1992), 279-358 (pp. 328-9). Stephen Spender wrote in 1943: 'large numbers of old-timers had to be promoted. This led to the kind of absurdities that would arise if all the porters in our railway stations were suddenly, at an hour's notice, made station masters, while a miscellaneous collection of conscripts, ranging from bricklayers and clerks to University Professors, became porters working under them.' See William Sansom, James Gordon, and Stephen Spender, *Jim Braidy: The Story of Britain's Firemen* (London: Lindsay Drummond, 1943), pp. 52-4.

to pieces.<sup>52</sup> *Loving* concludes with Raunce and Edith migrating back to England, whose weary post-war society, declassed amidst a phalanx of initials, is described in *Back*. In a world of amputated veterans, proliferating bureaucracies, and generalized austerities, class markers are uncertain or deliberately obscured. Ernest Mandrew, one of the few men able to keep servants, is Ernie the bookie. That the classes are no longer what they seem also occurs in the translated passage from the memoirs of the Marquise de Créqui: it is a forgery, thus undermining the fixed station and presumptive superiority of the aristocracy.

In *Nothing* and *Doting*, the main characters are also coming to grips with a post-war class system in flux. Bassoff claims that these novels are failures because they focus exclusively on an insignificant, fatuous upper class, but this reading simplifies the complex negotiations in a society of enfeebled class identities.<sup>53</sup> Eton educations and lunches at the Ritz do not erase worry about money or the pressure of ‘endless work work work’ (*Nothing*, 12). If Green often uses characters’ names to get at their identity, as Stokes notes, then Arthur Middleton is exactly right as a name for the gross forces pushing everyone towards a single identity and class.<sup>54</sup> As the waiter of indeterminate nationality at the grand, once exclusive hotel says at the

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<sup>52</sup> Osbert Sitwell, Foreword to Ralph Dutton, *The English Country House*, 2nd rev. edn (London: B.T. Batsford, 1943-4), p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Bassoff, *Toward ‘Loving’*, p. 165.

<sup>54</sup> Stokes, *Novels of Henry Green*, pp. 46-7. Pomfret has its own charms, and they seem to be culinary. Two possibilities appear. There is the pomfret itself, a common table fish in India: Pomfret recalls a ‘that time at the club when he [Richard Abbot] got stuck with a fishbone’ (15). The name, as such, could be a nod to the declining imperial system. It could also be a homonym for *pommes frites*. John Pomfret is constantly at the table, and that so much of the book revolves around meals and food, from the lunching at a hotel like the Ritz, the meals served in private homes, or the twenty-first birthday party feast.



opening of *Nothing* of the diners, ‘they are not your people, they are any peoples sir, they come here now like this, we do not know them Mr Pomfret’ (13).

These words by Pascal are in many ways the death knell for Green’s writing. In Virginia Woolf’s delineation of the ‘leaning-tower generation’, the group which began writing in the mid-twenties, she predicts that when society is ‘merged in one class’ it ‘will be the end of the novel, as we know it.’ While she goes on to say that this is not to be lamented, because literature ‘is always ending, and beginning again,’ her comments are prescient for Green.<sup>55</sup> His premature silence has been explained either by his increasing physical debility or his attachment to an anemic theoretical view of the novel.<sup>56</sup> Neither explanation is convincing. Despite poor health, he lived for another twenty years and continued writing (though refusing to publish). That a few radio talks in 1950 could have extinguished his imaginative faculties seems unlikely, especially since Green’s theoretical notions prefigured those of the *nouveau roman*, which blossomed later in the decade (1957 saw the publication of Alain Robbe-Grillet’s *La Jalousie* and Michel Butor’s *La Modification*). The likelier reason is that the changing structure of post-war British society did not allow Green to use class as a structuring principle to his novels, effectively robbing him of one of his great themes and formal devices. North gets close to this idea when arguing that the changing social circumstances and literary tastes alienated Green, but he does not specify what these changing social circumstances were.<sup>57</sup> That the class system was

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<sup>55</sup> Woolf, ‘The Leaning Tower’, p. 176.

<sup>56</sup> Phelps, ‘The Vision of Henry Green’, p. 620; and Bruce Harkness, ‘The Lucky Crowd—Contemporary British Fiction’, *English Journal*, 47 (1958), 387-97 (p. 389).

<sup>57</sup> North, *Writing of His Generation*, p. 214.

transformed almost out of recognition is the most important factor to consider. While Philip Gibbs in his role as social prophet tended to hyperbole, his claim in 1933 that ‘[w]e are all becoming middle class’ was a trend accelerated by the Second World War.<sup>58</sup> When James Lees-Milne lunched at the Ritz in 1947, he noted that it was all ‘[v]ery pre-war, butler and footmen, wines and desserts.’<sup>59</sup> Despite this opulence of a bygone era, the Ritz was no longer the reserve of the upper class, as government regulations limited the maximum price of a meal and made it affordable to even modest wage-earners – hence Pascal’s observation quoted earlier. There are also formal reasons why Green’s writing tended to stagnate as class differences became less prominent. Because many of his characters are given only a name and an occupation but otherwise appear almost without a background, class placement allows for a nuance that is otherwise lacking, as the apocalyptic classlessness of *Concluding* shows. The Second World War provided Green with so much material because it was a time of rapid social change; the levelling after the war and the push towards national unity and centralization was the exact opposite of what his literature thrived on.

### **Proletarianism as Theory and Practice**

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<sup>58</sup> Philip Gibbs, *Ways of Escape* (London: Heinemann, 1933), p. 305. In 1946-7, 1 per cent of the population in Britain owned 50 per cent of all private property; see T.B. Bottomore, *Classes in Modern Society* (New York: Vintage, 1966), p. 38.

<sup>59</sup> James Lees-Milne, *Caves of Ice* (London: Faber, 1984 [1983]), p. 141.

By the mid-thirties, *Living* would not have stood out for its treatment of working-class life, for, as Cecil Day Lewis claimed, it was ‘no longer accepted by the poet that a factory has not the qualifications for poetic treatment possessed by a flower.’<sup>60</sup> But when the novel appeared, a July 1929 review in *Life and Letters* claimed that ‘[n]either in form nor matter can precedent be found’ for it.<sup>61</sup> Evelyn Waugh, an early champion of the novel, recalled nearly twenty years later how path-breaking it was: ‘No one wrote about the poor before him [Green].’<sup>62</sup> The accuracy of these claims can only be determined by positioning *Living* with respect to its literary-historical backdrop. To this end, I first look at the theory of ‘revolutionary realism’ that dominated interwar leftist criticism and then three texts considered classics of proletarian writing, Tressell’s *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole*, and Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier*.<sup>63</sup> My method here is not to make explicit comparisons between *Living* and these cases; I present each one independently, allowing for the full comparison to be made when the following section examines *Living*’s narrative techniques. My main argument is that rather than developing a distinctly proletarian aesthetics, these other works remain embedded within bourgeois forms and a simplistic understanding of literary value. The vast majority of British proletarian fiction showed itself averse to formal experimentation. Using traditional narrative techniques and language to appeal to middle-class readers

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<sup>60</sup> Cecil Day Lewis, *A Hope for Poetry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1934), p. 58.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Readers’ Reports’, *Life and Letters*, 3.14 (July 1929), p. 66.

<sup>62</sup> Evelyn Waugh to Nancy Mitford, May 1947, in *The Letters of Nancy Mitford and Evelyn Waugh*, ed. by Charlotte Mosley (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996), p. 74.

<sup>63</sup> The term ‘revolutionary realism’ appears in Anne Elistratova, ‘Jack Conroy: American Worker-Writer’, *International Literature*, 1.7 (April 1934), 112-8 (p. 112).

undermined both the aesthetic value of these works and their political message. Dependent upon tropes and replete with stereotypes about heroes and the working class, they do not advance an alternative literary proletarianism and thus fail to accomplish their stated goals of accurately depicting working class life. While Green shared this objective ('I just wrote what I saw and heard'), he understood, as I shall argue later, that the transfer of vision and spoken speech into a written text could never be direct. His formal innovations were not ends in themselves, as some critics have argued, but were done, as Green later admitted, to make *Living* 'as taut and spare as possible, to fit the proletarian life [he] was then leading.'<sup>64</sup>

#### *The Theory of Revolutionary Realism*

While Green was still at Oxford, Edward Hulton, who later came to publish *Picture Post*, contributed an article to *Cherwell* which bemoaned the 'rabid realism' of '[o]ur 1925 Zolas': their fixation on 'dirt and degradation', Hulton argued, was a cheap attempt to elicit political sympathy.<sup>65</sup> Remove the elitist rancour and one would be in line with the prevailing theory of proletarian literature, a 'documentary realism' felt to be 'revolutionary' in its own right.<sup>66</sup> The underlying theory of the *Left Review*, stated Montagu Slater, was that 'to describe things as they are is a revolutionary act in itself.'<sup>67</sup> This point could not be stressed enough: 'To portray the whole scene as it is', wrote Arthur Calder Marshall, was the 'most important function of the

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<sup>64</sup> Green, 'The Art of Fiction', in *Surviving*, pp. 247, 246.

<sup>65</sup> Edward Hulton, 'The Modern Novel: Rabid Realism,' *Cherwell*, 5 December 1925, p. 204.

<sup>66</sup> Kenneth Worpole, *Dockers and Detectives: Popular Reading: Popular Writing* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 77.

<sup>67</sup> Montagu Slater, 'The Purpose of a Left Review', *Left Review*, 1 (June 1935), 369-65 (p. 365).

revolutionary novelist.’<sup>68</sup> Formal innovation, Granville Hicks warned in a review of Dos Passos, ‘is likely to prejudice the proletarian reader.’<sup>69</sup> Summarizing these views, Pamela Fox argues that ‘[r]ealism was considered an oppositional strategy in itself, a deliberate choice of the working-class writer potentially leading to wide-ranging reform if not outright insurrection.’<sup>70</sup>

This theory had its roots in the historical determinism of Marxism. Its application to literature came from Engels’s 1885 letter to Minna Kautsky, an Austrian writer (and mother of Karl Kautsky) who wrote *Die Alten und die Neuen* (1884), which was set in a salt mine village:

[A] socialist biased novel fully achieves its purpose, in my view, if by conscientiously describing the real mutual relations, breaking down conventional illusions about them, it shatters the optimism of the bourgeois world ...<sup>71</sup>

Lenin consolidated this position into the belief that literature should be ‘imbued with the spirit of the class struggle being waged by the proletariat for the successful achievement of the aims of its dictatorship.’<sup>72</sup>

Because class war was ongoing and conditioned by the forces of history, the socialist novelist only had to depict what was already underway. In this view, the novelist had to burrow beneath the superficial ideology of the superstructure to show

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<sup>68</sup> Arthur Calder Marshall, ‘Romains & Dos Passos’, *Left Review*, 2 (January 1937), 874-81 (p. 876). See also Anthony Blunt, ‘The “Realism” Quarrel’, *Left Review*, 3 (April 1937), 169-71.

<sup>69</sup> Granville Hicks, ‘Problems of American Fellow Travelers: Notes on American Novelists, Poets and Critics’, *International Literature*, 1.3 (July 1933), 106-9 (p. 108).

<sup>70</sup> Fox, *Class Fictions*, p. 47. See also Julian Markels, *The Marxian Imagination: Representing Class in Literature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003), Chapter 3.

<sup>71</sup> Friedrich Engels to Minna Kautsky, 26 November 1885; in ‘Friedrich Engels on Literature’, trans. by Jesse Lloyd, *International Literature*, 3.2 (1933), 122-3.

<sup>72</sup> V.I. Lenin, ‘On Proletarian Culture’ (1920), in *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory*, ed. by C. Vaughan James (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973), pp. 112-3 (p. 112).

the deep base, class division. Ignorance of these iron laws was no excuse, as James Barke's Glasgow-based proletarian novel, *Major Operation* (1936), shows:

But she knew nothing about the fundamental reality of her own existence. Even her desires, her ambitions were not from within her; they were primarily social desires ... She did not even realise she was wrapped in a chrysalis of social convention that she might discard.<sup>73</sup>

Proletarian realism was driven by the goal of propaganda, a term that by the 1930s no longer held the same horror it had for Harold Lasswell in his classic *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927).<sup>74</sup> Instead of stigmatizing propaganda as disreputable, leftists such as Orwell argued that '[t]oute littérature est une propagande.'<sup>75</sup> The only question was whether it stood for progressive or regressive forces, and if the proper literature could be effective propaganda: 'I imagine that it is generally accepted by readers of LEFT REVIEW that "literature is propaganda." But I am not sure that we emphasise often enough the converse that the most lasting and persuasive propaganda is literature.'<sup>76</sup>

Treating working-class characters as the manifestation of a larger social phenomena turned them into a type, which also occurred for working-class characters in Victorian fiction, as P.J. Keating notes: 'Put simply the most important single fact about the fictional working man is his class.'<sup>77</sup> Inspired by its revolutionary goal, proletarian realism treated the working class as a monolithic

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<sup>73</sup> James Barke, *Major Operation* (London: Collins, 1936), pp. 37-8.

<sup>74</sup> See Richard S. Lambert, *Propaganda* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1938).

<sup>75</sup> Paul Nizan, *Pour une nouvelle culture*, ed. by Susan Suleiman (Paris: Grasset, 1971), p. 34.

<sup>76</sup> Slater, 'Purpose of a Left Review', op. cit., p. 361.

<sup>77</sup> P.J. Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 2. Lukács pointed out as much when arguing that realism was structurally dependent upon type; see Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), p. 6.

entity. John Sommerfield's *May Day* (1936) – which trumpets the slogan 'FORWARD TO A SOVIET BRITAIN' throughout – assumes as much:

In this whirlpool of matter in motion forces are at work creating history. These fragile shreds of flesh are protagonists of a battle, a battle where lives are wasted, territories destroyed, and populations enslaved.

Every true story of today is a story of this struggle.<sup>78</sup>

Thirties proletarian writing explored, studied, and investigated these types. Reportage, such as the tradition of Victorian 'social explorer' writing, also treated the working classes as 'specimens.'<sup>79</sup> The fourth issue of *Fact* proposed 'to survey typical corners of Britain as truthfully and penetratingly as if our investigation had been inspecting an African village.'<sup>80</sup> Mass-Observation, one of whose founders was an anthropologist, observed, 'We barely know the elementary facts of intercourse or conception in Bolton or Bournemouth; we know more, as a matter of fact, about Borneo or New Guinea.'<sup>81</sup> The ubiquity of such social investigations is decried in James Hanley's *Grey Children* (1937), which is set in the coalfields of southern Wales:

[A]ll the people down here, have grown very, very sensitive about the enormous number of people who come down here from London and Oxford and Cambridge, making inquiries, inspecting places, descending underground, questioning women about their cooking, asking men strings of questions about this, that and the other.<sup>82</sup>

Hanley was not the only person rankled by this anthropological exoticization of working-class culture. In his 1939 lecture, 'Writing about the Working Class', Leslie

<sup>78</sup> John Sommerfield, *May Day* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1936), p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> Charles Booth, from *Life and Labour of the People in London*, in Peter Keating, ed., *Into Unknown England, 1866-1913: Selections from the Social Explorers* (London: Fontana, 1976), p. 126.

<sup>80</sup> 'The Four Corners of Britain' (Editorial), *Fact*, 4 (July 1937), 4-6 (p. 4).

<sup>81</sup> Qtd. in Ben Clarke, *Orwell in Context: Communities, Myths, Values* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 32.

<sup>82</sup> James Hanley, *Grey Children: A Study in Humbug and Misery* (London: Methuen, 1937), p. 22.

Halward noted that writers whose experience of the working class was through ‘casual contact and occasional eavesdropping ... should leave the working class alone ... if for no other reason than that working class people don’t care for being examined and written about as if they were African savages.’<sup>83</sup> The inability to give expression to the human personality within the working class, to not type-cast it, is why both Ralph Fox and Storm Jameson admitted in the late 1930s that proletarian fiction had failed: its realism had been too prosaic, its viewpoint middle-class and its characters lifeless.<sup>84</sup>

#### *Robert Tressell’s Perspectives*

While Green was working on *Living*, Edward Garnett asked him what he thought of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, the defining working-class novel of the time, which had already sold over 100,000 copies.<sup>85</sup> Garnett, who had previously argued that ‘nearly all our writers have a middle-class bias and training’, which made them ‘stand aloof from and patronize the bulk of the people who labour with their hands’, must have been worried about the new project of his young prodigy.<sup>86</sup> Green’s response to Garnett’s question about Tressell’s novel is not known, but one can imagine it to be *Living*, which shares a number of similarities with *The Ragged*

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<sup>83</sup> Leslie Halward, ‘Writing about the Working Class’, Fircroft Workingmen’s College, Birmingham, October 1939; qtd. in Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents*, p. 118.

<sup>84</sup> See Ralph Fox, *The Novel and the People* (New York: International Publishers, 1945 [1937]), p. 76; and Storm Jameson, *The Novel in Contemporary Life* (Boston: The Writer, 1938), p. 23.

<sup>85</sup> Treglown, *Romancing*, p. 70; Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction*, p. 33. It has recently undergone another revival; see Vanessa Thorpe, ‘*The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* Leads Surge in Popularity for Leftwing Books’, *Guardian*, 2 May 2009.

<sup>86</sup> Edward Garnett, ‘Henry Lawson and the Democracy’ (1902), in *Friday Nights: Literary Criticisms and Appreciations* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1922), pp. 177-88 (p. 181).



*Trousered Philanthropists*. Both are sympathetic to the working class and both are regional novels, Tressell's depicting house-painters in the south of England and Green's metal factory workers in Birmingham. The greatest difference is that *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, as I shall show, presents the working class from the outside, wherein Tressell's desire to spearhead the cause of Socialism reduces everything to a single interpretation and meaning. Green, by contrast, as I shall argue later, works from the inside, silencing the narrator and creating an open text.

The vocabulary of 'authenticity' and documentarism dominated the early reception of Tressell's novel. Jessie Pope, the editor of the 1914 edition, called it a 'remarkable human document ... the work of a housepainter and sign-writer and therefore completely authentic.'<sup>87</sup> This point was repeated in contemporary reviews, with the *TLS* praising 'its minute fidelity, its convincing air of fact' and the *New Statesman* saying it did 'especial good to those who have an inadequate conception of what workmen in general and men in the building trade in particular have to put up with'.<sup>88</sup> These readings were encouraged by Tressell's preface, in which he proclaims his intention to present a 'faithful picture of working-class life ... from the cradle to the grave'.<sup>89</sup> The novel is not so much a picture, though, but an argument. Worming into the lives of the workers consists of presenting a family budget, a nod to the documentary tradition of Charles Booth; later proletarian writings, such as

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<sup>87</sup> F.C. Ball, *One of the Damned: The Life and Times of Robert Tressell, Author of 'The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists'* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), pp. 166, 170.

<sup>88</sup> 'A Novel by a Builder's Labourer', *TLS*, 23 April 1914, p. 199; *New Statesman*, 25 April 1914, p. 88.

<sup>89</sup> Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, ed. by Peter Miles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 5. Hereafter cited *TRTP*.

Walter Brierley's *Mean-Test Man* (1935) and Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, also employed this tactic.<sup>90</sup> There are intrusive, moralizing monologues and working-class characters who are not socialists are systematically denigrated. The good Socialists are type-cast: Frank Owen, the agitator and intellectual, is first seen 'as usual absorbed in a newspaper' with 'a suggestion of refinement in his clean-shaven face' (*TRTP*, 10). There are moments of exhortatory didactic realism:

no one who is an upholder of the present system can consistently blame any of these men. Blame the system. If you, reader, had been one of the hands, would you have slogged? Or would you have preferred to starve and see your family starve? If you had been in Crass's place, would you have resigned rather than do such dirty work? (*TRTP*, 205)

Ralph Fox could have pointed to such a passage when he called most proletarian literature 'churned-up political rhodomontade' inhabiting the 'political manifesto stage'.<sup>91</sup> Although Tressell notes that his 'characters express themselves in their own sort of language', the Socialists and the narrator speak in Standard English while the non-Socialist workers have accents and awkward syntax – a decision made, no doubt, in order to 'appeal to a very large number of readers' (*TRTP*, 5-6).

Green's method in *Living*, by contrast, works from the inside. There is no external narrator to link characters and events into a predetermined history. Nor is there a 'kaleidoscopic chaos' of detail, of the kind which Lukács claimed

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<sup>90</sup> At the beginning of *Means-Test Man*: 'The Public Assistance Committee allowed him twenty-five shillings and threepence a week, six shillings of which went in rent and rates, two shillings in sick-clubs; the rest provided food, clothes, coal, light and the hundred and one things which are included in the connotation of the term "a home".' See Walter Brierley, *Means-Test Man* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1983 [1935]), p. 7.

<sup>91</sup> R.M. Fox, 'The Wage-Earner in Literature', *New Statesman*, 22 January 1927, 445-6 (p. 446).

characterized the realist novel.<sup>92</sup> Rather, the reality of working-class lives in *Living* is a result of the work's heightened fictionality and strong sense of form, as the following sections will argue. But there is little doubt that Green was aware of Tressell's work and sought to avoid, in his own novel, the course it took, while taking from it the warm sympathy for some of the working-class characters and its minute attention to the regional context.

*The Novel on the Dole: Walter Greenwood, Realism, and the Middle-Class*

Realism and authenticity were considered the defining qualities of Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* (1933), the 'working-class novel of the period' and the 'quintessential work of the decade'.<sup>93</sup> Contemporary reviews praised its objectivity: it was 'facts, facts, facts, all the way', the socialist *New Clarion* emphasized, while the Marxist *Plebs* said it was 'a perfect authentic picture, as detailed as a Dutch painting, of life as it is lived by millions in the industrial North to-day'.<sup>94</sup> *The Nation* called it an 'authentic treatment of the lives of working people,' 'the best kind of propaganda' for working-class politics because of its

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<sup>92</sup> Georg Lukács, *Writer and Critic: And Other Essays*, ed. and trans. by Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin Press, 1970), p. 133.

<sup>93</sup> Peter Miles and Malcolm Smith, *Cinema, Literature & Society: Elite and Mass Culture in Interwar Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 124; Roger Webster, 'Love on the Dole and the Aesthetic of Contradiction', in *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), pp. 48-61 (p. 49). There are a number of versions of *Love on the Dole*: the original novel, the stage version written in collaboration with Ronald Gow, a variant of that stage version for the American production, and finally the film. The British stage version tended to emphasize the plight of Sally, as opposed to the novel, whose main focus is arguably Harry. On the differences among these versions, see Caroline Levine, 'Propaganda for Democracy: The Curious Case of *Love on the Dole*', *Journal of British Studies*, 45 (2006), 846-74.

<sup>94</sup> Review of *Love on the Dole*, *New Clarion*, 8 July 1933; qtd. in Matthew Gaughan, 'Palatable Socialism or "The Real Thing"?: Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole*', *Literature and History*, 17.2 (October 2008), 47-61 (p. 48).

‘honesty of representation’.<sup>95</sup> The *TLS* noted that ‘[a]s a novel it stands very high, but it is in its qualities as a “social document” that its great value lies’, while the *Manchester Guardian* stated that its ‘authenticity is beyond dispute’.<sup>96</sup> These views have continued to influence its reception; Stuart Laing notes that the work’s ‘semi-documentary’ quality has led critics to focus on its historical, not literary, qualities.<sup>97</sup>

The novel follows the travails of Harry Hardcastle, who is first seen as a young man starting work. Rather than presenting his story as a kind of proletarian *Bildung*, Greenwood structures the novel to highlight circularity: it begins with Harry’s mother falling down the stairs at dawn and closes with his wife stumbling down the stairs, also at dawn. The novel’s opening and closing with essentially the same scene shows Harry’s confinement, a theme established in the first pages, when he first wakes: he ‘crawled on all fours to the edge of the bed’ and then thought, ‘No escape; *had to go*.’<sup>98</sup> The lack of meaningful escape is central to the novel, which details the quashed hopes of the numbered workers (Harry is 2510) clocking in and out for years until they are replaced by younger apprentices.<sup>99</sup> This was a central theme for Greenwood, whose second novel, *His Worship the Mayor* (in America entitled *The Time Is Ripe*), begins, ‘No matter which twopenny tramcar ride you take

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<sup>95</sup> Review of *Love on the Dole*, *The Nation*, 26 September 1934, p. 361.

<sup>96</sup> D.L. Murray, review of *Love on the Dole*, *TLS*, 29 June 1933, p. 444; review of *Love on the Dole*, *Manchester Guardian*, 7 July 1933; qtd. in Stephen Ross, ‘Authenticity Betrayed: The “Idiotic Folk” of *Love on the Dole*’, *Cultural Critique*, 56 (Winter 2004), 189-209 (p. 191).

<sup>97</sup> Stuart Laing, ‘Walter Greenwood: Working-Class Writer’, in *CCCS Selected Work Papers*, ed. by Ann Gray and others, 2 vols (London: Routledge, 2007), II, 80-91 (p. 82).

<sup>98</sup> Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933), p. 20 (emphasis original). Hereafter cited *LOD*.

<sup>99</sup> Ironically, the Marlowe’s factory in *Love on the Dole* was based on Metropolitan Vickers, which was able to stay open during the depression because of orders from the Soviet Union. See the information on Walter Greenwood on the Working Class Movement Library website ([www.wcml.org.uk](http://www.wcml.org.uk)); accessed 9 May 2009.

from the centre of the Two Cities your terminus will be such as you will find, had your choice taken you on any other route.’<sup>100</sup>

William Empson calls proletarian fiction a version of the pastoral because the most meaningful escape is not geographic but utopian, society’s transformation to socialism.<sup>101</sup> In Ellen Wilkinson’s *Clash* (1929), the protagonist Joan Craig, a socialist organizer, places this grand goal above everything: ‘Family or friends were carelessly shed if something exciting in the way of a strike or a good organizing row called her to any distant town.’<sup>102</sup> But *Love on the Dole*’s socialist agitator, Larry Meath, dies in a demonstration, crushing any hopes of raised political awareness in the town. The escapes available to working-class men are drink, football, and betting pools, while the women indulge in ‘cheap artificial silk stockings, cheap short-skirted frocks, cheap coats, cheap shoes, crimped hair, powder and rouge’ (*LOD*, 56), a common criticism of working-class women at the time.<sup>103</sup> These accessories to seduction lead to a love that lasts only until the birth of a first child, at which point the cost of maintaining a house on a low income becomes overwhelming:

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<sup>100</sup> Walter Greenwood, *The Time Is Ripe* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1935), p. 3. This novel shows the influence of *Living*: in the first chapter, ‘Bride Street’ (4-5) is twice made a separate paragraph, in much the same way Green’s novel begins ‘Bridesley, Birmingham,’ and the final chapter is also framed in a formulation typical of Green’s *Living*: ‘Sunday morning: the twenty-third after Trinity’ (317).

<sup>101</sup> William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935), Chapter 1.

<sup>102</sup> Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash* (London: Virago, 1989 [1929]), p. 11.

<sup>103</sup> Describing the scene in the High Street area of Glasgow on the coronation of George VI, Mass-Observation reports: ‘Women in shawls and girls are rubbing their faces with “make-up” that is used for branding cattle in the market. Streaked with blue or red they look like Maoris, or painted savages in a war-dance. They seem capable of anything.’ See Mass-Observation, *May the Twelfth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), pp. 234-5. In Sommerfield’s *May-Day* the factory girls have ‘their synthetic Hollywood dreams, their pathetic silk stockings and lipsticks, their foolish strivings to escape’ (30). Sommerfield tries to salvage the point by claiming that nonetheless these women ‘are the raw material of history’ and that if they were organized ‘in a mass ... then there are revolutions’ (30), but one doubts.

The vivacity of their virgin days was with their virgin days, gone; a married woman could be distinguished from a single by a glance at her facial expression. Marriage scored on their faces a kind of preoccupied, faded, lacklustre air as though they were constantly being plagued by some problem. As they were. How to get a shilling, and, when obtained, how to make it do the work of two. ... Simple natures all, prey to romantic notions whose potent toxin was become part of the fabric of their brains. (*LOD*, 40-1)

The other escape, for both sexes, is the ‘whiling away of time watching flickering shadows on a screen or the trumpery gaiety of a dance-room’ (*LOD*, 186) – in Day-Lewis’s analysis, this involves people ‘revelling in situations to which they dare not aspire, envying a life they haven’t the guts to create.’<sup>104</sup> Though the novel critiques the workers’ subjugation to the unbending laws of standardized production, it falls prey to the same critique when considered from a literary perspective: *Love on the Dole* does not present an alternative proletarianism but remains confined within the tradition of the bourgeois novel.<sup>105</sup>

The strongest evidence that *Love on the Dole* targets the middle class, just as Tressell had done, is its use of linguistic class translation. The first line – ‘They call this part “Hanky Park”’ – gives the outsider authority to define the working-class community, whose geography is translated for the middle-class reader: ‘black patches of land, “crofts,” as they are called’ (*LOD*, 13). This alien world is further emphasized by the historical survey of the district and then an anthropological treatment of its customs. No proper character appears, while the only instance of working-class speech is neutered:

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<sup>104</sup> C. Day Lewis, ‘Letter to a Young Revolutionary’, in *New Country*, ed. by M. Roberts (London: Hogarth Press, 1933), pp. 39-40.

<sup>105</sup> On this point more generally, see Caroline Snee, ‘Working-Class Literature or Proletarian Writing?’ in *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties*, ed. by Jon Clark et al (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), pp. 165-91.

The ‘sand-bone men’ who purvey the lumps of sandstone in exchange for household junk, rags and what-not, can be seen pushing their handcarts and heard calling their trade in rusty, hoarse, sing-song voices: ‘San’bo— Donkey brand brown sto – bo – one,’ which, translated, means: ‘I will exchange either brown or white rubbing stone for rags bones or bottles’. (*LOD*, 14)

Such moments recur: when Harry and Sally are late in leaving the house for work, their mother tells them, ‘Y’ll be quartered’. That sounds ominous, and would hit the right note about the corporal destruction wrought by their jobs, but the narrator puts in parenthesis, ‘fined a quarter hour’s wage for impunctuality’ (*LOD*, 23).<sup>106</sup> Greenwood could have intended some irony in these parentheses (contrasting dialect to the convoluted standard phrase in order to show the paucity of the latter), but the overall impulse of the novel towards Standard English and a fine literary style rules out that possibility.

The novel’s hero, the Socialist Larry Meath, is a type, similar to Frank Owen in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and Jock MacKelvie in *Major Operation*. They are all outcasts: Owen is an immigrant; Meath’s ‘quality of studiousness and reserve elevated him to a plane beyond that of ordinary folk; he seemed out of place’ (*LOD*, 29), and MacKelvie senses ‘the punishment of being compelled to live in the slums’ where he ‘had known himself to be an outcast’.<sup>107</sup> Their intelligence and kindness is apparent not through their actions but is written in their faces: the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> In *Living*, when a man is put on the lavatory door to clock the men in and out, giving them seven minutes, the workers complain that this ‘ain’t long enough for a man to do what nature demands of ’is time, stop ’im a quarter ’our of ’is pay if ’e’s a minute over’ (225).

<sup>107</sup> Barke, *Major Operation*, p. 73.

century view of physiognomy appropriated by the Victorian novel makes a re-appearance in these proletarian novels.<sup>108</sup>

These protagonists all speak Standard English and share an enthusiasm for learning. Larry Meath reads books and speaks persuasively: ‘You became so very conscious of the loose way of your speech when you heard him speaking’ (*LOD*, 114), Sally thinks. Meath addresses ‘you people’ on the need for them to ‘awaken’ (*LOD*, 115) to the truth of the economic system. His Standard-English advocacy for Socialism makes it emanate from people who are from ‘a different species’ than the public it is intended to target (*LOD*, 130).<sup>109</sup> No connection is made: Larry’s street-corner exhortations were delivered ‘to an audience of street-corner mouchers, who, for the most part, stood awhile then drifted to the pubs or where not’ (*LOD*, 183). Sally reflects after an expedition to the countryside with Meath and his political friends:

Their conversation, too, was incomprehensible. When the talk turned on music they referred to something called the ‘Halley’ where something happened by the names of ‘Baytoven’ and ‘Bark’ and other strange names. They spoke politics, arguing hotly about somebody named Marks. Yes, they were of a class apart, to whom the mention of a pawnshop, she supposed, would be incomprehensible. Suppose they saw her home; her bedroom! She blushed, ashamed. (*LOD*, 130)

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<sup>108</sup> Graeme Tytler, *Physiognomy in the European Novel: Faces and Fortunes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982). Contrast that to the view of Lenin by René Fülöp-Miller, in the book Mrs Dupret recommends, *Lenin and Gandhi*: ‘His exterior was completely that of any everyday man of the mass ... in no way distinguished from thousands and tens of thousands of his fellow citizens ... Lenin’s physiognomy has the features which one may meet at every turn in Moscow.’ René Fülöp-Miller, *Lenin and Gandhi*, trans. by F.S. Flint and D.F. Tait (London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1927), p. 9.

<sup>109</sup> See Chris Hopkins, *English Fiction in the 1930s: Language, Genre, History* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 43-50.



Sally tells her mother, ‘Oh, Ah love way he talks’ (*LOD*, 129), but the discrepancy between this admission in dialect and her distance from him, largely because of language and education, is too stark: she cannot be part of his world. She is not the only working-class person who cannot be helped by socialism. The quotation marks around the proper names Sally phonetically spells out are a moment of linguistic class translation working the other way, with cultured speech made working class, thus inviting the reader to correct her mistakes.

Sally is not the only working-class character whose language must be standardized. When Harry runs out of money before the week is up, he cries out, ‘Blimey! Blimey, Ah ne’er thought o’ this’ (*LOD*, 97). That sentiment is translated into Standard English for his internal thoughts:

His world was upset; everything appeared in a new, unfamiliar and chilling perspective. Terrifying intimations tiptoed through the numb silences of his mind; insistent voices whispered the harsh truth that he was no longer a boy. This new batch of shop boys had pushed him, willy-nilly, along the path of Age, a road he had no inclination to follow. And they had given no warning; the transition had not been gradual but precipitate. (*LOD*, 97-8)

That final phrase, admirably sinking alongside Harry’s prospects, ends with a heavy word, ‘precipitate’ – and the chemical meaning, that of a class apart, is perhaps just as appropriate, for the movement from ‘Blimey’ to the stand-alone paragraph is a class separation no solvent could dissolve. It is also the case that Harry’s problems – his false hopes of becoming a man through factory work, which only leads to the dole once his seven-year apprenticeship ends – begin because of his decision to abandon education and literacy, the bourgeois means of self-improvement:

Damned in a fair handwriting: ‘See our Harry’s handwriting. By gum, think o’ that, now, for one of his years.’ He had paid dearly for those flattering remarks. And now, if his parents were to have their way he was to be penalized even further; they wanted him to be a scrivener for the rest of his life. They *would* do. (*LOD*, 21, emphasis original)

This scene plays off Paul Morel’s trip to Nottingham in *Sons and Lovers* (1913), where employment in an artificial limb firm is secured through a letter; Paul’s sloppy and poor handwriting, though, means that he cannot remain a clerk.<sup>110</sup> This is just as well, though, given his artistic temperament. Harry, though, has no more than a clerk’s ambitions (sporting a new suit, going about town, having a girl) but these are thwarted by factory work. The ideological underpinning of the work, in other words, is not so much socialism as bourgeois respectability. By 1939, Greenwood could pen *How the Other Man Lives: Interviews with Some Typical Working People*. Quite clearly, the ‘other man’ is only ‘other’ for middle-class readers, and for its author, who had started thinking in this way in his debut novel.<sup>111</sup>

#### *The Mandalay Mandarin: Orwell on the Road to Wigan*

The foremost literary result of realism, documentarism and social exploration is George Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). Although Orwell and Green were at Eton together and shared a number of friends, there is only a tenuous link between Orwell’s work and Green’s *Living*: when discussing unemployment, Orwell uses Alf Smith and Bert Jones as stock names to describe two jobless Newcastle miners –

<sup>110</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976 [1913]), Chapter 5.

<sup>111</sup> Walter Greenwood, *How the Other Man Lives* (London: Labour Book Club, 1939). Every chapter is a ‘type’: ‘The Clerk’, ‘The Docker’, ‘The Bus Man’, ‘The Super Cinema Usherete’, etc. Only two of the 37 chapters do not have a definite article.

these same names appear in the first chapter of *Living*. Otherwise, though, I will argue that Orwell's work is an example of the disappointing results of a literary artist subscribing to the theoretical views of the interwar realist critics. Unable to completely suppress his literary aspirations, Orwell creates a mixed form, which is neither fact nor fiction.

Orwell's trip north was suggested to him by his publisher, Victor Gollancz, who saw a market for works on the underbelly of the English class system. He was seeing to press *The Condition of Britain* by G.D.H. and M.I. Cole, whose stated goal was to provide 'a true picture of the present condition of the British people.'<sup>112</sup> Other works in this genre include Allen Hutt's influential *The Condition of the Working-Class in Britain* (1933), Montagu Slater's *Stay Down Miner* (1936), which was part of a series entitled 'Reportage Books', Bill Brandt's *The English at Home* (1936), and films like *Industrial Britain* and *Coalface*. Orwell's inclusion of formalised, scientific housing descriptions and price lists is a nod to itemized family budgets in Booth's work on London and Rowntree's *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (1901).<sup>113</sup> The thirty-two photographic plates added to Orwell's text by Victor Gollancz were part of its documentary impulse. All of these characteristics made it easy to align *The Road to Wigan Pier* with the anthropological social explorer tradition, one reviewer

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<sup>112</sup> G.D.H. Cole and M.I. Cole, *The Condition of Britain* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), p. 17.

<sup>113</sup> See B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, 4th edn (London: Macmillan, 1902), Chapter 8.

wondering out loud ‘whether the most rudimentary peoples of the New Hebrides or Papua’ could match the horrors confronted up north.<sup>114</sup>

Ever since Gollancz’s infamous foreword, *The Road to Wigan Pier* has been praised for the detached authenticity of Part I and condemned for the personal excess of Part II. The *TLS* review, by Leonara Eyles (whose husband, D.L. Murray, saw *Love on the Dole* in similar terms), called Part I ‘merely a statement of facts and figures, together with photographs and word-pictures’; the *Left Review* stated that it created ‘pictures to stir the conscience and imagination of Britain.’<sup>115</sup> For Walter Greenwood, Part I was ‘authentic and first rate’; Arthur Calder-Marshall called it ‘accurately observed’ and praised the ‘detached’ narrator laying out the facts; Harold Laski considered it ‘admirable propaganda for our ideas.’<sup>116</sup> Part II, though, was universally panned. Storm Jameson, in her influential essay ‘Documents’, called it irrelevant because ‘there is no value in the emotions, the spiritual writhings, started in him by the sight, smell, and touch of poverty.’<sup>117</sup> In his *Daily Worker* review, Harry Pollitt called Part II the self-centred product of ‘a disillusioned little middle-class boy ... and late imperialist policeman.’<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Hamish Miles, review in *New Statesman and Nation*, 1 May 1937, in *George Orwell: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Jeffrey Meyers (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 110-3 (p. 111). Hereafter cited *GOCH*.

<sup>115</sup> [Leonora Eyles], ‘Those Who Live Poorly’ (review of *The Road to Wigan Pier*), *TLS*, 27 March 1937, p. 238; Derek Kahn, ‘The Road to Wigan Pier’, *Left Review*, 3 (April 1937), 186-7 (p. 186).

<sup>116</sup> Walter Greenwood, review in *Tribune*, 12 March 1937, in *GOCH*, p. 99; Arthur Calder-Marshall, review in *Time and Tide*, 20 March 1937, in *GOCH*, p. 102; H.J. Laski, review in *Left News*, March 1937, in *GOCH*, p. 104.

<sup>117</sup> Storm Jameson, ‘Documents’, *Fact*, 4 (July 1937), 9-18 (p. 11).

<sup>118</sup> Qtd. in Michael Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorised Biography* (London: Heinemann, 1991), p. 230.

This division, which has remained the conventional understanding of the work, is problematic.<sup>119</sup> Orwell's delineation of fact was fluid: *Down and Out in Paris and London* was first published as a novel.<sup>120</sup> More importantly, though, all of *The Road to Wigan Pier* could be titled 'An Outsider Sees the Distressed Areas'. This was the Victorian-sounding title of Orwell's lecture on his trip north, delivered at the Adelphi Summer School in early August 1936.<sup>121</sup> It is not so much that he was an 'outsider' (although at the start of his writing life, his attempts at transcribing proletarian speech were hampered by misspelling obscenities) but that the emphasis is on 'sees' and 'distressed' – Orwell does no more than 'see' what he already set out to see, 'distressed areas'.<sup>122</sup> As he noted in *The Road to Wigan Pier*: 'It is a kind of duty to see and smell such places now and again, especially smell them, lest you should forget that they exist; though perhaps it is better not to stay there too long.'<sup>123</sup> With this duty formulated beforehand, very little can shock the writing away from its righteous course.<sup>124</sup>

These lines upon seeing and recording appear before a vitally important scene, Orwell on a train looking at a young woman and feeling a kind of shared humanity:

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<sup>119</sup> Part I remains widely cited by historians as a source document; see Robert Pearce, 'Revisiting Orwell's *Wigan Pier*', *History*, 82 (1997), 410-28.

<sup>120</sup> Gordon Bowker, *Inside George Orwell* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 168.

<sup>121</sup> See *CWGO*, x, 493.

<sup>122</sup> This was a common term at the time, though the official government designation was the euphemistic 'Special Areas'. In November 1937, the Left Book Club choice was Wal Hannington's *The Problem of the Distressed Areas*.

<sup>123</sup> George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier in Orwell's England: The Road to Wigan Pier in the Context of Essays, Reviews, Letters and Poems Selected from the Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. by Peter Davison (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 66 (Part I, Chapter 1). Hereafter cited *RWP*.

<sup>124</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Critique de la critique: un roman d'apprentissage* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984), p. 189.

The train bore me away ... As we moved slowly through the outskirts of the town we passed row after row of little grey slum houses ... At the back of one of the houses a young woman was kneeling on the stones, poking a stick up the leaden waste-pipe which ran from the sink inside and which I suppose was blocked. I had time to see everything about her – her sacking apron, her clumsy clogs, her arms reddened by the cold. She looked up as the train passed, and I was almost near enough to catch her eye. She had a round pale face, *the usual exhausted face* of the slum girl who is twenty-five and looks forty, thanks to miscarriages and drudgery; and it wore, for the second in which I saw it, *the most desolate, hopeless expression I have ever seen*. It struck me then that we are mistaken when we say that ‘It isn’t the same for them as it would be for us’, and that people bred in the slums can imagine nothing but the slums. For what I saw in her face was not the ignorant suffering of an animal. She knew well enough what was happening to her – understood as well as I did *how dreadful a destiny it was to be kneeling there in the bitter cold, on the slimy stones of a slum backyard, poking a stick up a foul drain-pipe*. (RWP, 66, emphasis added)

What is curious is that immediately after trumpeting his duty to see the full extent of the nation’s most damning conditions, the scene Orwell uses is, as a comparison with the diary he kept for his trip shows, entirely at odds with what he experienced. He clearly consulted his diary for the scene, because one of the phrases is unchanged (‘how dreadful a destiny it was to be kneeling’).<sup>125</sup> In the diary, Orwell is not on a train but walking up a side-alley in Wigan. The version in *The Road to Wigan Pier* puts him ‘almost near enough to catch her eye’, that ‘almost near’ providing the intimacy to recount his tale while emphasizing an unbridgeable distance that being on the train condemns him to. The diary recounts that ‘she looked up and caught my eye, and her expression was as desolate as I have ever seen; it struck me that she was thinking just the same thing as I was.’<sup>126</sup> This instant of communion, the possibility of not being an outsider, is effaced in the book version in favour of an epiphany

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<sup>125</sup> Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* Diary, in *CWGO*, x, 427.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, x, 427.

concerning middle-class thinking.<sup>127</sup> The woman who had passed by Orwell is reduced in the book version to a scrutinized object; he only needs a ‘second’ to size her up and determine everything there is about her. Rather than admitting his guilt of not being able to talk to this woman who clearly touched him, the book version falsifies the experience to create a tragic scene, replete with literary tropes (the omniscient narrator, physiognomy providing clues to character).

Such a highly charged literary technique shows Orwell straying from documentarism and realism, the erstwhile models for *The Road to Wigan Pier*. Hamish Miles, reviewing the book in *New Statesman and Nation* in May 1937, called Orwell’s ability to find ‘the dingiest house in the most sunless street’ ‘Gissingesque’.<sup>128</sup> The literary association is apt, for despite Orwell’s desire to only see (and smell) and report, he is caught in literary associations: during his trip north, he not only took in the Brontë home but when he entered a mine, it was Wentworth Pit in Barnsley (owned by Earl of Fitzwilliam), the same one D.H. Lawrence visited.<sup>129</sup>

That middle-class thinking, and not the experience of the proletariat, is the main object of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, is evident from the text’s programmatic language: ‘the usual exhausted face of the slum girl’. Throughout Part I there is a linguistic teleology subsuming every particular into a larger class or type: ‘rooms

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<sup>127</sup> There are also gender implications to Orwell’s gaze here; *The Road to Wigan Pier* has been roundly criticized for overlooking the role of women in the Wigan cotton mills. Lancashire in general was ‘the classical area of female labour’ in England, as Hutt put it, but Orwell doesn’t say a word about this. See Allen Hutt, *The Condition of the Working Class in Britain* (New York: International Publishers, 1933), p. 81.

<sup>128</sup> Hamish Miles, review in *New Statesman and Nation*, 1 May 1937, in *GOCH*, p. 110.

<sup>129</sup> Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980), p. 190.

that are not serving their rightful purpose'; 'proper sleep'; 'like all people with permanently dirty hands'; 'the kind of person who has no surname'; '[l]ike so many unemployed men'; 'as usual'; 'the kind of accommodation'; 'the typical unmarried unemployed man'; newspaper-canvassers are 'a type I had never met before'; 'the kind of place'; 'people like the Brookers.' And all of this is culled from the description of the lodging-house above the tripe shop where Orwell stayed, a very particular thing indeed.

Lady Bell's *At the Works*, a book on ironworkers in Middlesbrough which took shape after thirty years of observation and over one thousand home visits, noted the problems of outsider observation:

There is nothing more difficult, in looking at some one else's house or way of living, than to ascertain exactly what the qualities and defects are from the point of view of the occupant, although it may be easy to see what they are from the point of view of the spectator.<sup>130</sup>

Orwell should have known better, not just because of Bell's warning, but also because he was eager to criticize other writers for their easy approach to social class. When writing *The Road to Wigan Pier*, he reviewed Alec Brown's *The Fate of the Middle Classes* in the May 1936 *Adelphi* and accused its analysis of the English class-system of being simplistic: 'It is like watching somebody carve a roast duck with a chopper.'<sup>131</sup> Yet Orwell persisted in his own duck-chopping partly because it created a larger reach for his claims – instead of a single lodging house which happened to be dirty, his is the symbolic lodging house, etc. – but also because it

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<sup>130</sup> Lady Bell (Mrs Hugh Bell), *At the Works: A Study of a Manufacturing Town*, 2nd edn (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1911), p. 27.

<sup>131</sup> Orwell, *CWGO*, x, 478.



formally linked the two parts of the book. Orwell's self-analysis in Part II is driven by the same method: 'I am sufficiently typical of my class ... to have a certain symptomatic importance' (*RWP*, 139). Part II is vital to the documentary reporting of the first half because '[t]o get rid of class-distinctions you have got to start by understanding how one class appears when *seen through the eyes* of another' (*RWP*, 146, emphasis added). But the overall impulse of the work is to see not an individual face but the face of the working class; and when doing this, Orwell's eyes (and nose) are ruled by the same assumptions and prejudices as those of his readers.

### **Formal Methods and Fictional Worlds in Living**

As opposed to the preceding works, which chose proletarian subjects but continued to use bourgeois forms with their inherent class biases, *Living* does not depend upon conventional novelistic techniques in its treatment of working-class life. That Green's more experimental methods do not conform to the period's standard understanding of realism does not undermine his stated goal of accurately depicting working-class life. While 'accurate', 'authentic' and 'truthful' are philosophically contested terms, I use them in a manner consistent with Green's understanding, by which I mean that his novel attempts to present Birmingham working-class culture as he saw it. Of course, his perspective – or anyone else's, for that matter – cannot be a complete or faithful reproduction. But Green did try to provide an account which, in its own terms, did not falsify that life. He attempted, I argue, to move beyond

simplified portraits which remain structurally dependent upon literary tradition and middle-class codes. In so doing, *Living* charts an alternative course for proletarian fiction, though one that was largely not taken.

I begin by considering how *Living*'s realism is not dependent upon the primacy of vision. This leads me to a discussion of narrative presence. By undermining the narrator's central role in dispensing authoritative information and histories, *Living* cannot be interpreted from the outside but requires the reader to burrow within it. I then consider its formal organization before concluding with a discussion of Green's fidelity to the Birmingham experience. While his formal methods appear to make an accurate depiction impossible, the overall portrait matches very closely the cultural and economic reality of the city at the time.

### *Seeing Bridesley*

The first line of *Living* is bare, verb-less, and seemingly objective: 'Bridesley, Birmingham.' Nothing could be closer to the documentary impulse of realism than naming the scene and grounding the ensuing narrative in a single locale:

Bridesley, Birmingham.  
Two o'clock. Thousands came back from dinner along streets.  
'What we want is go, push,' said works manager to son of Mr Dupret  
...  
Thousands came back to factories they worked in from their dinners.  
'I'm always at them but they know me. They know I'm a father and  
mother to them. ...'  
Noises of lathes working began again in this factory. Hundreds went  
along road outside, men and girls. Some turned in to Dupret factory. (207)

The sinking opening sentence roots the novel in the specificity of place. The scene closes with a further specification of the Dupret factory as the dominant site (only ‘some’ enter ‘this factory’), the city reduced to being ‘the barracks of an industry.’<sup>132</sup> This visual-documentary method is reminiscent of Zola’s *Germinal*, where the eyes of Étienne Lantier, a stranger, are a lamp onto the Lorraine mining community. This method remained influential in regional working-class representation, as in the same year as *Living*’s publication German photographer August Sander began his *Deutschenspiegel* (Mirror of the Germans) series, and years later Walker Evan’s photography was merged with James Agee’s pared-down prose to form *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941). In *Living* the narrative perspective alternates between long takes and close-ups. The use of these ‘cinema “shots”’, as Auden wrote in his review of *Living*, are an important formal principle for the novel, whose scenes vary in length from a few paragraphs to a number of pages.<sup>133</sup>

Yet the narrative camera does not provide a visual picture of Bridesley. Nouns rarely have adjectives, houses and streets lack descriptive histories: Edward Garnett thought the novel’s visual element so underdeveloped that he advised Green to ‘insert a few descriptive passages, early in the story, so that one may visualize the

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<sup>132</sup> This is the phrase the Hammonds used to describe industrial cities; see J.L. and Barbara Hammond, *The Town Labourer, 1760-1832: The New Civilisation* (London: Longmans, Green, 1917), p. 39.

<sup>133</sup> W.H. Auden, ‘Ironworks and University’, *The Town Crier* (Birmingham), 21 October 1938, in *The Complete Works of W.H. Auden*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, 3 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988-2008), III.1: *Prose and Travel Books in Prose and Verse, 1926-1938* (1996), 460-3 (pp. 460-1).

environment'.<sup>134</sup> Yet Green refused the 'painstaking application of rural local colour' which Q.D. Leavis later criticized as typifying regional novels.<sup>135</sup> The haze of geography in *Living* is best expressed by Lily Gates, lost in Liverpool: 'What is a town then, how do I know? What did they do? ... Houses made the streets, people made the houses. ... All the same, these streets! Well, she wouldn't look, that's all' (355-7).

This refusal of pictorial description shifts the community from a geographic site (and sight) to an imagined one. It is not the place itself, its external aspect, that matters, but its voice and spirit. This is entirely appropriate, as the district of 'Bridesley' does not exist (there is no such quarter in Birmingham) but is a suggestively-named fiction whose qualities have to come from inside the text. That the visual cannot capture the culture of a city is stressed when Dick Dupret walks down a street and passes Lily: he 'did not notice her, she was so like the others' (329). He sees only 'a kind of terrible respectability on too little money' and thinks that there is 'only marriage and growing old' (328-9). While this draws attention to the district's name, Bridesley (meadow of brides), Dick's reductive view of marriage does not capture the complex reality of this institution for the community. It is the means by which culture is propagated and extended in time, a point made when Mrs Eames speaks about her baby son growing to be a man at the spinning lathes. For the Craigan house, though, marriage is a threat to the family's unity. These complexities,

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<sup>134</sup> Qtd. in George Jefferson, 'Green and Garnett', *London Magazine*, 18.2 (1978), 58. The refusal of visual painting was a marked feature of Green's novels; see Davidson, 'The World of "Loving"', p. 66.

<sup>135</sup> Q.D. Leavis, 'Regional Novels', *Scrutiny*, 4 (1936), 440-7 (p. 440).

plus the fact that the community cannot be contained either within a name or captured through a single look, are not available to Dick, who only sees what he has already imagined: ‘Then he forgot all about them and thought about himself’ (329).

*The Silenced Narrator in Living*

Dick Dupret’s inability to see – he is no Étienne Lantier – is a metaphor for the narrator in *Living*. Rather than using an outsider to see and interpret, Green drastically limits the narrator’s presence. If the narrator becomes a camera, as Isherwood dreamed in *Goodbye to Berlin* (‘I am a camera with its shutter open, recording, not thinking’<sup>136</sup>), it should not be able to divulge its position. Yet it is precisely the tendency to state the narrative’s position that thwarts Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier*: he is always positioning himself within the scene, at times falsifying experience to make it dramatic and literary. Green, on the other hand, does not provide a secure vantage point. He replaces traditional narration, which is tied to a middle-class perspective with its longing for both omniscience and the secure possession of events and characters, with a limited narrator who does little more than mechanically introduce a scene: ‘They came into front room after supper’ (258); ‘Eight o’clock of morning. Thousands came up the road to work and few turned in to Mr Dupret’s factory’ (217). The dialogue mainly avoids the tags of he-said, she-said, and how it was said (happily, with relief, etc.). Characters are not provided with a back story, their physiognomy is mainly unspecified (unlike the previous proletarian

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<sup>136</sup> Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1945), p. 7.

novels, whose heroes always have kindness and intelligence written in their faces), and traditional atmospheric writing is avoided.

More typically, the narrator refuses to intervene in the story even when the reader might feel it necessary. The opening scene takes place between ‘works manager’ and ‘son of Mr Dupret’, characters lacking any but functional qualities. The next scene is inside the factory: ‘Some had stayed in iron foundry shop in this factory for dinner. They sat round brazier in a circle’ (207). A typical image of working-class life, the circle symbolizes equality while sitting marks a moment of leisure: there will be storytelling and camaraderie before ‘the noise of lathes working made it so what he said could not be heard’ (210). A story does follow, but it concerns disguise, falling, and personal rivalries between characters that haven’t been introduced; all this is incomprehensible. The difficulty of the language, the bewildering number of names and the diversity of actions described lead to confusion, not clarity. No external perspective is given to evaluate the story, which cannot be wrested away from its speakers but must be accepted on its own, admittedly bewildering, terms. This is quite a shock for the middle-class reader, who has always been given codes to decipher meaning, especially when it concerns the lower classes, who are assumed to not have a right to secrets. This moment of leisure, in other words, becomes transformed into literal work for the reader.

Green’s awareness of the novelty of what he is doing comes out in Chapter 13, in the section with Hannah Glossop, an upper-class girl Dick finds mildly annoying but then starts to pursue after she begins to see a young diplomat. ‘We

have seen her feeling,' one sentence begins; 'Then, as we have seen,' begins another; and to finish the section, 'But stretch this simile ...' (315-6). Prior to this, having arrived late to a dinner, 'our Richard' comes down into an empty dining room (296). This appeal to the solidarity between narrator and reader occurs in a section describing the upper classes. Yet in a novel whose community is defined through polyphony and whose most sympathetic character, Craigan, is illiterate, there is no 'we' that the narrator can appeal to.<sup>137</sup> Green's understanding of the class bias of the traditional narrator is marked out in these examples by the bloated language at odds with the novel's otherwise austere diction.

### *Forging parallelism*

The narrator's role in *Living* is primarily organizing and selecting material. Green himself later admitted that 'the superimposing of one scene on another, or the telescoping of two scenes into one, are methods which the novelist is bound to adopt in order to obtain substance and depth.'<sup>138</sup> This narrative method of forging mirrors the workers' labour in Birmingham, 'a town of forges whence arose perpetually the music of the anvil.'<sup>139</sup> This metaphor of narrative as an act of forging appeared most famously in Joyce's *Portrait*: 'I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of

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<sup>137</sup> J.D. Beresford argued in 1927: 'In the stable days of Queen Victoria, a Dickens, a Thackeray, or a Trollope could sit down to his desk with a comfortable sense of assurance that he knew the public for which he was writing and was himself a member of it. ... There is no longer the least assurance that the novelist's reality is the same as that of a sufficiently large body of people to ensure popularity.' See his 'Experiment in the Novel', in *Tradition and Experiment in Present-Day Literature: Addresses Delivered at the City Library Institute* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), pp. 22-53 (pp. 51-2).

<sup>138</sup> Green, 'A Novelist to His Readers: II', in *Surviving*, p. 145.

<sup>139</sup> Bournville Village Trust, *When We Build Again: A Study Based on Research into Conditions of Living and Working in Birmingham* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1941), p. 4.

experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race'.<sup>140</sup> Edward Garnett, who abridged Doughty's *Arabia Deserta*, praised Doughty for how he 'forges and smelts words'; his 'forging and tempering' of his style to represent his subject matter, in Garnett's view, was unparalleled in travel literature.<sup>141</sup> The metaphor was adapted to proletarian writing by Ralph Fox in his influential *The Novel and the People* (1937):

On the forge of his own inner consciousness the writer takes the white-hot metal of reality and hammers it out, refashions it to his own purpose, beats it out madly by the violences of thought ... The whole process of creation ... is in this violent conflict with reality in the effort to fashion a truthful picture of the world.<sup>142</sup>

In *Living* the narrator's forge parallels the workers' skilled labour and is contrasted to the machines, which threaten to rob the workers not only of their jobs but also of their principal means of self-expression.<sup>143</sup> Green's narrative forging can be thought of as a struggle against standardized literary production, a kind of Taylorism where writing is efficient, stripped to its bare essences, connected as a whole and without waste, to create a serial, automatic reading. *Living*, though, implicitly decries any overarching or systematic interpretation. If most narratives work through a strict causal and temporal logic, *Living*'s formal coherence comes from parallel events and discourses reflecting back upon another while at the same time allowing for purely gratuitous moments unconnected to the major plot.

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<sup>140</sup> Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 288.

<sup>141</sup> Edward Garnett, 'Mr C.M. Doughty' (1902-8), in *Friday Nights*, pp. 105-11 (pp. 110-1).

<sup>142</sup> Fox, *Novel and the People*, pp. 30-1.

<sup>143</sup> On his visit to Green's Birmingham factory in 1930, Evelyn Waugh marvelled at 'the manual dexterity of the workers. Nothing in the least like mass labour or mechanization—pure arts and crafts' (*Diaries*, 23 June 1930, p. 317).



This technique on the stylistic level is announced in the novel's opening, with the repetition of lines: 'Thousands came back from dinner along streets' becomes, two lines later, 'Thousands came back to factories they worked in from their dinners' (207). The repetition of the lyrics of a dance song – first at a country house party attended by the wealthy, and then sung by a troupe on the train Lily and Bert take to Liverpool – is another obvious example of this technique. A number of very broad thematic parallelisms informs *Living*: owner/employee; master/servant; skilled/unskilled; hand/machine; labour/leisure; factory/home; city/countryside; human/bird; speaker/listener; reality/escape; healthy/sick, and old/young. The understated parallelism to the title – dying – is also crucial. Even on a trivial level, when Mrs Dupret gives her husband a book, it is called *Lenin and Gandhi*.<sup>144</sup> I will not focus on these thematic contrasts but on two parallel scenes with important implications for the class understanding of the novel: first, an analysis of the words 'dinner' and 'ring' for the Dupret and Craigan households; and secondly, two housewives of the labouring class, Mrs Eames and Mrs Bridges.

The depiction of Mrs Dupret dining with her son in Chapter 4 is an especially fertile use of parallelism, with multiple connections across the novel; indeed, just before they sit down, the sense that what follows will echo throughout the work is introduced by Dick thinking to himself, 'When I am with her I echo as a landscape

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<sup>144</sup> The book was meant 'to describe the life and work of the two men whose personalities, in the author's opinion, most forcibly embody the spirit of the present age.' Rather than stressing the obvious incompatibility between Lenin's proletariat dictatorship and Gandhi's non-violence, the work argued for the similarities of these two 'rebels'. None of this is mentioned in *Living*; the book, in fact, seems ridiculous, not merely because Mrs Dupret recommends it. See Fülöp-Miller, *Lenin and Gandhi*, pp. vii-viii.

by Claude echoes' (229). The most immediate contrast is with the opening scene, when the workers 'came back from dinner along streets' (207). This link is made explicit as it is revealed that the Dupret dinner is on the same day as Dick's first visit to the factory, with Dick repeating, at the dinner, one of the work manager's phrases (230).

Yet while all that is said about the workers' dinner is that it was on the clock, when Mrs Dupret and her son sit down for their evening meal, the narrative methodically proceeds from soup to dessert. Domestic servants serve them inside a comfortable, private space. But this dinner is not warm conviviality in the bosom of the family; Mrs Dupret complains that her friend 'threw me over' (229), and Dick admits that 'Dolly chucked me' out (229). The family is brought together, in other words, only by chance, not by conscious choice. Their social obligations take precedence over having a 'quiet evening together' (229). What is meant to be leisure is, for the Duprets, made into work: their schedules are complicated by social commitments, dances, dinners, and hunting parties which have to be attended. Dick speaks of being 'tired, last night had been late' (229), yet this complaint comes in a section of the novel that begins with the factory workers unable to speak because they 'had worked all day', 'their strength ebbed after the hard day' (228-9).

Yet the parallelism of the 'dinner' between the Dupret household and the workers is inexact since the workers call their mid-day meal 'dinner' and their evening meal 'supper'. This linguistic division not only shows how social class influences language but also makes the reader consider the Dupret dinner in contrast

to working-class families having supper, of which two occur in the same chapter. Earlier in the chapter the Tarvers sit down to supper (after 'I've 'ad a feed,' Tarver says, he will write his letter of complaint about Bridges, who has made the firm 'the laughing stock of every firm in Brummagen' [227, 226], and so his pre-supper talk is tied to Dick's worries about the firm), and the chapter closes with the Eames household having supper.

This linguistic parallelism has another component when the Dupret dinner scene closes with an elaborate description of Mrs Dupret's rings:

She pushed button of bell; this was in onyx. She laid hand by it on table and diamonds on her rings glittered together with white metal round onyx button under the electric light. Electric light was like stone. (230)

She pushes the bell to call the butler (what Raunce in *Loving* calls 'to punish the bell' [19]), who is told to fetch the footman, who had been just sent upstairs to find her handkerchief, a moment of considerable class tension: the footman's movement is unaccounted for, which creates a feeling that he is not performing his functions (and thus getting paid for nothing), but also, more dangerously, he is possibly free in the master's quarters, which would be unthinkable.<sup>145</sup> The call to the butler, who is above the footman in the hierarchy of domestics, differentiates the servants, who are no longer a singular entity, just like the factory workers are not a homogeneous unit but divided by skill and experience. Yet in the country house, Mrs Dupret worries what would happen if the servants found out that she had a hand in arranging for a 'harlot' to visit her ailing husband, so she 'had to invent many ruses that the servants might not know' (267). Mrs Dupret depends upon the hands of the lower orders for

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<sup>145</sup> As Mrs Tennant is forced to wonder in *Loving*, 'what do we know about the servants' (169).

her personal cleanliness, in the form of a handkerchief, and the sounding bell parallels the factory sirens and shows how servants are reduced ‘to the condition of machines, who never move but at the beck of our caprices.’<sup>146</sup> Mrs Dupret’s glittering jewels and the onyx bell are paid from the labour of the men in the factory, which is described in detail in the preceding scene:

In the foundry was now sharp smell of burnt sand. Steam rose from the boxes round about. On these, in the running gates and risers, metal shone out red where it set. ... They raised and lowered long rods into metal in the risers so as to keep the metal molten. Steam rose up round them so their legs were wet and heat from the molten metal under them made balls of sweat roll down them. Arc lamps above threw their shadows out sprawling along over the floor and as they worked rhythmically their rods up and down so their shadows worked. ... So their strength ebbed after the hard day. Mr Craigan’s face was striped with black dust which had stuck to his face and which the sweat, in running down his face, had made in stripes. He put hands up over his face and laid weight on them, resting elbows on his knees. (228-9)

The shadows of the men labour alongside them, making it appear as if their lot is condemned to endless toil in this life and the next (indeed, there is talking of helping the devil shovel coals earlier). The metal in the factory is still molten, and thus can burn those who are careless, while Mrs Dupret’s rings are brought into view after she finds unsatisfactory the response of her domestics to a piece of her own carelessness. Mrs Dupret, though, is unaware of this, which makes one recall a line from ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’:

And time for all the works and days of hands  
That lift and drop a question on your plate.

That question never strikes Mrs Dupret. She praises her son for being ‘appreciative’ about a chance to enter business yet her behaviour shows a flippant disregard about

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<sup>146</sup> William Hazlitt, *The English Comic Writers and Miscellaneous Essays* (London: Dent, n.d.), pp. 288-9. This is from his essay ‘Footmen’.

the state of the factory. In the time they spend together, she does not ask about his experience at the factory but about whose dance he attended the night before, showing just how very little she cares about the business – a point that the following scene brings into focus, as it has Walters and Bridges discussing the firm's bleak economic prospects. The way in which the economic system devours workers – Tarver's best worker, Whitacre, is sacked; Bridges has severe anxiety that his own position in the firm is not secure ('Where do I stand then, tell me that' [231]); the labourers are striped black after a day's work and their strength depleted – is the fitting parallelism to the Dupret dinner.

The rings upon Mrs Dupret's fingers also set up a contrast with the opening of the next chapter:

Water dripped from tap on wall into basin and into water there. Sun. Water drops made rings in clear coloured water. Sun in there shook on the walls and ceiling. As rings went round trembling over the water shadows of light from sun in these trembled on walls. On the ceiling. (232)

The basin has been presumably filled by Lily and is used by the men to wash up after returning home from work. The rings within it are the result of a leaky tap: the only rings in the Craigan household are products of poverty, shoddy homes and faulty plumbing. Yet this does not stop the aesthetic fascination with these rings of water illuminated by the sun, which spreads their shadows across the room – these shadows parallel those of the labouring men's in the factory. Mrs Dupret's rings, by contrast, glitter under electric light, which has the hardness of 'stone'; this electricity is not only artificial but also deadly, as later in the novel, the doctor's chauffer 'had been watching machinery which made electric light for this house in country. He

watched too close, caught in fly-wheel he was killed' (283).<sup>147</sup> That Lily is the one who filled the basin and presumably watched the rings form is also appropriate, as she ends up in love with the sun because of the cinema. She loves films set in tropical countries, 'in images she saw in her heart sun countries, sun, and the infinite ease of warmth' (290), and these dreams lead her to escape with Bert Jones in the hopes of a marriage ring.

Alongside the antitheses between the rings under light, the scenes correspond in other ways. The basin in which the rings form is there for the labourers to wash after their day of work, while in the Dupret dinner scene Dick admits that '[i]t was so dirty there that I had to have a bath as soon as I was back' (230).<sup>148</sup> The basin scene begins with falling water but quickly turns to its major disclosure, an accident at the factory, a five-eight spanner which fell and nearly killed Mr Craigan, while in the earlier scene Dick complains that in the factory 'they've had no fresh blood in the show for years' (230), the phrase 'fresh blood' appearing grotesque given the industrial risks the labourers endure.<sup>149</sup>

Chapter 4 ends with the Eames household at supper:

Mrs Eames put cold new potato in her mouth.

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<sup>147</sup> In *Loving*, by contrast, the great house, 'which was almost entirely shut up, had no electric light' (26).

<sup>148</sup> Note that Amabel in *Party Going* has the same feeling after going through the crowds; she too *has* a bath. Alan Ross notes '*To TAKE a bath* is non-U against U *to HAVE one's bath*.' See Alan Ross, 'U and Non-U: An Essay in Sociological Linguistics', in *Noblesse Oblige: An Enquiry into the Identifiable Characteristics of the English Aristocrat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002 [1956]), pp. 3-28 (p 20).

<sup>149</sup> That the elderly Mr Dupret dies of a fall sets up another point of parallelism here, especially given its ridiculous nature – he slipped on dog shit. The fall of morals in the Dupret household subsequent to that, and the decline in the factory's fortunes, is an inevitable consequence of this fall. The first dialogue in the factory, incidentally, concerns Tupe 'fallin' about' and Joe Gates refusing to come to his aid (207-8), a story that now has a deeper poignancy.

‘Ain’t they good’ said she.  
 ‘They are’ he said.  
 ‘Better’n what you could get up the road or if you took a tram up into town.’  
 ‘There’s none like your own.’ (231-2)

This inverts the famous food parallelism in *Germinal* (1885), where the opening two chapters of Part Two contrast the wealthy abundance of the Grégoire household to the poverty of the Maheu house. The ‘lovely smell of brioche’, freshly-baked, dipped in chocolate for the rich family’s breakfast is drawn against the fare of the poor, leftover vermicelli and ‘yesterday’s coffee-grounds’ which make a ‘coffee so pale in colour that it looked like rusty water.’<sup>150</sup> In *Living*, though, after showing the aristocratic dinner, it is the working-class supper that is fulfilling, and one of the key reasons for that is that the potatoes are from their garden. Yet this is misleading; at the produce shop earlier, ‘Mrs Eames ... stood to watch potatoes on trestle table there’ and ‘said she saw prices was going up again’ (218). The cold new potato, in other words, is eaten out of necessity, and while it may taste better than the potatoes on sale, that is a moot point since those are too dear.

After dinner, Mrs Eames ‘[sits] on then looking out of window’ and then notices the flowers on their table: “‘Why look’ said she “you bought ’em back from the garden only yesterday and I put them in that pot, and now all their faces’ve turned to the sun’” (232). This closes the chapter, and the next one begins with the water rings in the basins illuminated by the sun. It seems, therefore, that the sun which shines on working-class families is much brighter than the electric light

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<sup>150</sup> Émile Zola, *Germinal*, trans. by Leonard Tancock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954 [1885]), pp. 91, 93.

illuminating Mrs Dupret's rings. But these flowers turning to the sun, which come from their garden, connect back to flowers in the Bridges household, a description of which ends the first chapter:

Evening. Was spring. Heavy blue clouds stayed over above. In small back garden of villa small tree was with yellow buds. On table in back room daffodils, faded, were between ferns in a vase. Later she spoke of these saying she must buy new ones and how nice were first spring flowers. (213-4)

While the flowers in the Eames household are brought 'back' from their garden, the Bridges household does not make use of their budding 'back garden' in the same way: Mrs Bridges buys her flowers. The Eames family, with its newborn, cannot afford to buy potatoes, much less flowers; the works manager, several steps above Eames on the pay scale in the factory, can afford this luxury.

*Birmingham's Unique Working Class Culture and Its Representation in Living*

That the Bridges and the Eames households are both working-class is apparent – in their speech, manners, and similar houses with back gardens – but it is equally clear that they are not the same. One of *Living's* strengths is that it does not turn the working class into a type or see class through the tripartite division of proletarian, middle-class, and aristocrat. Green did not treat class as a fixed entity: 'There are not two or three social classes but hundreds well defined throughout Britain' (*PMB*, 189). When describing his own time in the foundry, Green notes the different types of labour he engaged in: 'first in the stores, then as a pattern maker, then in the ironfoundry, in the brassfoundry, and finally as a coppersmith', as if to stress the unique position of these employments (*PMB*, 232).



Just as his experience in these different jobs convinced him of the particularity of each, Green portrayed in *Living* a particularized and specific working-class culture. The fit between Birmingham working-class culture and *Living* has not been investigated by scholars, who do not even pose the question of whether Green was attempting to capture a reality more finely detailed than an all-encompassing proletarian or working class.<sup>151</sup> Yet Green was not alone in thinking that local conditions mattered; as J.B. Priestley remarked in his *English Journey* (1934), ‘England, even now, is still the country of local government, local politics, strong local interests’.<sup>152</sup> Because of its interest in presenting a very particular community, *Living* does not smooth over tensions and division about class belonging (‘Where do I stand then, tell me that’ [231]) or class as a weapon (‘This was loss of caste for Gates to be perpetually with them, as he was step above a labourer’ [308]). In the factory the labourers are not an undifferentiated mass but alternate between communal feeling and personal division (as in the first story of the workers around the brazier); in their leisure time, they go to the cinema, the pub, football matches, the Symphony, loaf on the streets smoking cigarettes, take walks in the countryside, play tennis, or garden (a growing middle-class activity).<sup>153</sup> While much of the working-class culture Green described would have held true in any large industrial

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<sup>151</sup> There are working-class characteristics that were, at the time, stereotypical: betting, racing pigeons, drink. But these play a very minor role in *Living*.

<sup>152</sup> J.B. Priestley, *English Journey: Being a Rambling but Truthful Account of What One Man Saw and Heard and Felt and Thought during a Journey through England during the Autumn of the Year 1933* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1934), p. 24. Priestley, of course, had a very dim view of Birmingham, calling it a ‘parade of mean dinginess’ and ‘beastly’, full of ‘dreariness and ugliness’ (66-7).

<sup>153</sup> Stephen Constantine, ‘Amateur Gardening and Popular Recreation in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries’, *Journal of Social History*, 14 (1980-1981), 387-406 (p. 388).

town in Britain (the pub, football matches, etc.), Birmingham's working-class had a history of small-scale works, not enormous factories, which resulted in less hierarchical master-worker relations and an emphasis on skilled products rather than mass production.

*Living* cannot be understood without considering the particularities of Birmingham's working class.<sup>154</sup> The key factor in developing its unique culture was isolated by Tocqueville in 1835: 'At Birmingham, few large industries, many small industrialists ... the workers work in their own houses or in little workshops in company with the master himself.'<sup>155</sup> This remained true well into the twentieth century: in 1948, over 90 per cent of the city's 10,000 factories had fewer than one hundred workers.<sup>156</sup> These small works meant that owner-employee relations were more intimate than in other parts of the country:

In the ordinary workshops ... masters and men often worked at the bench together, and so were comrades rather than masters and servants. Ranks were not so sharply divided as to exclude real companionship and intercourse. ... It was not uncommon for workmen to address their employer ... by his Christian name.<sup>157</sup>

When a worker calls him by his first name, Dick Dupret thinks this 'offensively familiar' (271). What is not stated is how common this was in Birmingham factories; only the outsider would be offended.

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<sup>154</sup> The following discussion follows G.C. Allen, *The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black County, 1860-1927* (London: Frank Cass, 1966 [1929]); Asa Briggs, *History of Birmingham*, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), II: *Borough and City, 1865-1938*; and Alan Fox, 'Industrial Relations in Nineteenth-Century Birmingham', *Oxford Economic Papers*, n.s., 7 (1955), 57-70.

<sup>155</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Journeys to England and Ireland*, trans. by George Lawrence and K.P. Mayer, ed. by J.P. Mayer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), pp. 104-5.

<sup>156</sup> B.L.C. Johnson, 'The Distribution of Factory Population in the West Midlands Conurbation', *Transactions and Papers (Institute of British Geographers)*, 25 (1958), 209-33 (p. 214).

<sup>157</sup> J.T. Bunce, qtd. in Fox, 'Industrial Relations in Nineteenth-Century Birmingham', p 57.

The prevalence of small-scale works, often owned by former workers, made Birmingham workers more independent and assertive towards their rights. By Victorian times, they had developed a group identity as ‘a community of workers in metal.’<sup>158</sup> In *Living*, the workers keep critical information away from management so that they cannot ‘interfere’ (213). The well-known ability of Birmingham workers to solve problems cooperatively and work closely together, which was a product of the small factories specializing in skilled products, meant that they tended to ignore overseers, especially those who did not work alongside them. The placement of a guard at the lavatory door in the Dupret factory is felt by the workers to treat them like ‘animals’ (225). It is such a severe abrogation of their rights that it should be taken up in court (238) because it ‘interfered with reasonable liberty of men in the works’ (271).<sup>159</sup>

The conflict between management and workers is largely over efficiency: management considers ‘business as a kind of machine’ and looks to punish workers when the ‘machine or unit ... not functioning to its full productive capacity’ (246). This management push occurs when there ‘were no profits anywhere’ (231), an undercurrent throughout the novel of the difficult economic conditions Birmingham faced in the mid-1920s when ‘[w]hole industrial areas bore the appearance of desolation, as if the messengers of want had swept the land’ and over 100,000 local

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<sup>158</sup> William Henry Bassano Court, *The Rise of Midland Industries, 1600-1838* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 70.

<sup>159</sup> On the ‘Taylorized toilet’, see Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 65.

workers lost their jobs.<sup>160</sup> As Alan Fox and other historians argue, Birmingham workers were historically protective of their identity as skilled workers.<sup>161</sup> This explains why the workers in *Living* are always identified by their role in the factory and why they resist management's efforts to speed up production at the expense of quality. In the opening tour of the factory, the works manager admits to Dick Dupret that his authority to order the factory is limited, as Joe Gates, the troublemaker in his eyes, cannot be fired 'for fear I might put Craigan in a rage' – because Craigan is 'the best moulder in Birmingham', this cannot be done (209). Dick is told by Bridges that personal eccentricity in skilled workers must be accepted: 'the best engineer I ever met couldn't see you to talk business with you but he 'ad his pet spaniel on a chair by him. There's no accounting for it, none' (209). The repeated failure to patch up the holes on the factory roof – which lets sparrows in – hints at, symbolically, the resistance of the workers' space to enclosure and managerial control (and also is in a way paralleled to the pigeon motif throughout the novel). The workers feed the sparrows crumbs and also bet on them, actions that, in a machine-dominated environment, speak of the impulses of nature and community (208).

H. Gustav Klaus faults *Living* because '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.'<sup>162</sup> This, though, is not

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<sup>160</sup> Alexander Ramsay, *The Greater Problems of Industry* (Birmingham: Journal, 1924), p. 3. Unemployment figures come from Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, *Birmingham and District: An Official Guide* (Birmingham: Buckler and Webb, 1926-27), pp. 52-3.

<sup>161</sup> See Fox, 'Industrial Relations in Nineteenth-Century Birmingham', p. 57.

<sup>162</sup> H. Gustav Klaus, 'Socialist Fiction in the 1930s: Some Preliminary Observations', in *The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy*, ed. by John Lucas (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), pp. 13-58 (p. 31).

Green's bourgeois prejudice but his understanding that the Birmingham tradition stayed clear of large-scale corporatism. Mobilization was also difficult because of the migrants the city attracted. This is the case for many characters in *Living*, from the young Bert Jones from Liverpool, the singing Arthur Jones from Wales, and the elderly Mr Craigan, who reminisces about the countryside of his childhood. For many of the workers settled there, the city presented better prospects and an entirely unique working-class culture by comparison with anywhere else in England – Birmingham was, from 1900 to 1940, the fastest-growing provincial city in England.<sup>163</sup> It was not, of course, a worker's paradise; only the drafters of a 1928 Birmingham City Council report could have believed that it 'approached the modern conception of a perfect city', but Green's novel the following year had something to say about that view as well.<sup>164</sup>

### **The Speech of Class in *Living***

One of the greater problems in the proletarian texts examined earlier was their inability to sustain working-class language; the heroes are marked out by their use of Standard English and dialect is neutralized in favour of comprehensible, conventional speech. In *Memoirs of the Unemployed*, a series of interviews for *The Listener* and then published in a book form (including Walter Brierley's first published piece), the editors' proclaimed intention of presenting 'the authentic voice

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<sup>163</sup> *When We Build Again*, p. 43.

<sup>164</sup> W.S. Body, ed., *Birmingham and Its Civic Managers: The Departmental Doings of the City Council* (Birmingham: Stanford and Mann, for the City Council, 1928), p. 2.

of unemployed authors' is undermined by everything being put into Standard English.<sup>165</sup> Such a technique, I argued, undermined the possibility of developing an alternative proletarian aesthetics. *Living* stands out, though, by its development of a proletarian language. Rather than suppressing dialect, the novel celebrates it, without translating it for the middle-class reader.<sup>166</sup> To present working-class life openly and without concessions meant, for Green, adopting its language as it was spoken and used rather than how novelists had traditionally employed this material.

One of the distinguishing features of Green's employment of dialogue in *Living* and across his fiction is that much of it is gratuitous, with the narrator refusing to assemble it into a coherent whole. A free-flowing expression rules the page; in *Living*, this is set in the motion in the first factory scene, where the recounted story lacks any poignant moral or meaning. Green undoubtedly learned how to unshackle dialogue from novelistic teleology from Virginia Woolf, who turned inconsequential speech and thoughts into the core of character; he also could have gleaned this from Ronald Firbank, whose fiction in the 1920s influenced a number of young authors. But the overall effect of Green's written dialogue in *Living* is only apparent through the community of speech.<sup>167</sup> Not only does Green weave an entire novel out of a dialect not his own, but he also breaks down the traditional divide between the

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<sup>165</sup> H.L. Beales and R.S. Lambert, eds., *Memoirs of the Unemployed* (London: Gollancz, 1934), p. 13.

<sup>166</sup> There is one instance of Green doing this, though, and it occurs in *Loving*: "Not a sausage, not a solitary sausage," Raunce muttered at his back referring to the fact that he had not been tipped' (39).

<sup>167</sup> Dialogue has meaning, in other words, socially; see V.N. Vološinov, 'Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art (Concerning Sociological Poetics)', in *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*, trans. by I.R. Titunik (New York: Academic Press, 1976), pp. 93-116.

external body of characters and the narrative self when the narration adopts many of the defining features of Birmingham dialect.

Dialect is a strong marker of social identity and origins.<sup>168</sup> The main argument of proponents of the Queen's English in the nineteenth century was that dialect too prominently displayed difference: 'Few outward indications mark a man more plainly,' Henry Alford wrote, 'than his habit of pronouncing his own tongue.'<sup>169</sup> Standard English would show not rootedness but elevation, and thus mark out 'the well-bred and well-informed.'<sup>170</sup> 'The Education Act,' writes F.T. Elworthy in 1876, 'has forced the knowledge of the three Rs upon the population, and thereby an acquaintance in all parts of the country with the same literary form of English, which it has been the aim and object of all elementary teachers to make their pupils consider to be the only correct one.'<sup>171</sup> Some proletarian writers, beneficiaries of this educational expansion, bought into the ideological message of Standard English and pitted it against dialect in their works. In *Sons and Lovers*, Mr Morel, who is rude and drunk, speaks in dialect, while Paul's mother speaks in Standard English; in Brierley's *Means-Test Man*, Jane Cook insists 'that her husband should not use the dialect when speaking to their son.'<sup>172</sup> But elevating dialect above Standard English

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<sup>168</sup> Paul Richard Thompson, *The Edwardians* (London: Granada, 1977 [1975]), p. 92.

<sup>169</sup> Henry Alford, *The Queen's English: A Manual of Idiom and Usage*, 5th edn (London: Daldy, Isbister, 1875), p. 50.

<sup>170</sup> See the extremely valuable book by Tony Crowley, *The Politics of Discourse: The Standard Language Question in British Cultural Debates* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 132.

<sup>171</sup> Frederic Thomas Elworthy, *The Dialect of West Somerset* (London: Dialect Society, 1875-6), p. xliii.

<sup>172</sup> Brierley, *Means-Test Man*, p. 21. At the same time, Brierley undercuts this by presenting his narrative in Standard English and also by Jane's economic security; she 'had had lessons in elocution, and it was her speech and manner which had made her such a success as maid to the local doctor' (22).

had its own problem, namely that dialect could become uncritically accepted as ‘authentic’, such as Alec Brown’s 1934 call to arms, ‘WRITTEN ENGLISH BEGINS WITH US’.<sup>173</sup> It could also lead to distinct literary failures for the middle-class novelist, who often lacked intimate knowledge of working-class language: ‘I try to talk to them in what I imagine to be *their* language,’ the visitor Alan Sebrill says in Upward’s *In the Thirties* (1962).<sup>174</sup>

Birmingham dialect at the time was not a monolithic entity, and the idea that dialect firmly marks out social origins is a problematic one in *Living*. If dialect separates natives and strangers – in Liverpool, Lily hears ‘voices talking dialect strange to her’ (359) – this division is quite fluid, especially in Birmingham, a city of migration. Only a few decades after being incorporated as a town, it became, at the turn of the century, Britain’s largest provincial city, and by 1925 its population numbered nearly one million; so being ‘Brummagen’ through-and-through was less common than hailing from elsewhere in the country.<sup>175</sup> Lily’s boyfriend, Bert Jones, is from Liverpool, yet she never noticed anything odd about his manner of speaking even though he was ‘great on talking’ (255). And the men in her house are not ‘Brummies’. When her father and Mr Tupe are at the pub, ‘[e]ach spoke in broader country accent they had come from to Birmingham, speaking louder’ (285). Mr Craigan is from an unspecified region. Yet like Bert Jones, both Mr Gates and Mr Craigan have effectively modified their speech in order for it to be registered, at least

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<sup>173</sup> Alec Brown, ‘Controversy: Writer’s International (British Section),’ *Left Review*, 1.3 (December 1934), 75-80 (p. 77).

<sup>174</sup> Edward Upward, *In the Thirties* (London: Heinemann, 1962), p. 5.

<sup>175</sup> Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, *Birmingham and District*, p. 34.



in the eyes of other characters, as coming from ‘Brummagen’ (226) – although Mr Craigan ends it with an ‘m’, pronouncing it ‘Brummagem’ (269).

The most marked signification of dialect is class, yet here too Green shows that the fixed notions of the ties between the two are hardly stable. When he worked on the factory floor, Green was proud to have been elected as a workers’ representative at a general meeting, applauded by his fellow workers because he did not ‘talk posh.’<sup>176</sup> Perhaps it is only a question of aitches, as Orwell put it. Green’s position in *Living* is not as political as Orwell’s, but he does see language circulating across classes as well as dividing them. The first spoken line in the novel – ‘What we want is go, push’ – is said by the works manager to Dick Dupret, and later on Dick picks it up: ‘What we want in the place is some go and push’ (207, 230). The first line probably refers to the crowds around them, and how Dick should be pushing in order to go; Dick misunderstands the line, thinking that what is wanted in the factory is ‘some go and push.’ Although this seems like a misunderstanding, the use by Dick Dupret of the working-class speech shows his receptivity to it, and the novel itself never complains of any fundamental linguistic misunderstanding between Dick Dupret and the others. Dick’s mimicry, in fact, is not unique, as a number of characters speak in different registers depending on the audience and their purpose. The notion that the working-class has a unified dialect – it all sounds the same – is also problematic. Mr Tupe complains about Aaron Connolly, the crane operator, ‘Anyroads ’e ain’t no better’n a peasant, you can tell it by ’is speech’ (307). That Tupe is also from the country doesn’t prevent him from subdividing the working

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<sup>176</sup> Treglown, *Romancing*, p. 77.

class. That some of the workers spend their leisure time playing tennis, and others attend concerts at City Hall, shows that the working class is anything but a united community, and it is only natural that this diversity would extend to language as well.

‘Oho, listen to your haitches,’ Mr Eames says to his wife. This rebuke comes after she criticizes Craigan for not letting Lily ‘go out to work, nor out of the House Hardly ...’ (216). In expressing her desire for female independence, and doing so through language that is seen as outside the local dialect, Mrs Eames steps outside the community’s bonds, especially as she does this through the criticism of a patriarch, which makes her husband insecure in his own position. In *Loving*, the opposite happens when Miss Burch is told by Edith that a man is in Mrs Jack’s bedroom: “‘E’s puttin’ ’is shirt on,” was all Miss Burch said, shocked into dropping her aitches’ (77). Miss Burch’s repressed sexuality is linked here to her repressed class background, and in this moment of excitement, the masks on both are shelved: she longingly describes the idea of the naked man putting on his shirt in working-class speech.<sup>177</sup> Nevertheless, elevating women’s status may require a different class mentality, but *Living* shows that even well-off women must bear the brunt of patriarchy, as Mrs Dupret has to bear the indignity of calling upon the services of a prostitute for her husband when he is ill. Lily’s escape from the imprisoning household occurs after her father strikes her, but her way out is not gendered

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<sup>177</sup> When she inspects the bedroom, Miss Birch ‘did not seem able to keep her eyes from those other pillows on Mrs Jack’s double bed. These had been well beaten and the clothes were pulled up smooth over where that man’s body must have lain yet she stared on and off. It must have been she could not help herself’ (85).

emancipation: rather, she rushes into an attempted marriage and is quickly left behind when Bert Jones leaves her with her bags in her hands in Liverpool. Finally, if language is ultimately a site of class and gender struggle, silence can be a response to the hegemony of the powerful, as the works manager Bridges says to Dick before walking out: ‘Well you ain’t going to make me talk’ (324). After a shift, the men huddle around together: ‘They said nothing. They had worked all day’ (228). This silence that ‘weighs down as with a sense of physical oppression’ is not, as in Masterman’s analysis, a kind of ‘terror’ but rather a way of bringing the workers closer together than any words they could exchange.<sup>178</sup>

Just as the fixed relationships between locality and class with language are broken down, language itself is constantly modified through a process of circulation and contamination. Processes of migration, technological change, the wireless, the cinema: all of these constantly change language. Lily’s storytelling, when describing the humiliation she has suffered in Liverpool to her father figure, Craigan, is artificially cinematic:

‘Then ’e took me to a road where the trams went and I thought we was just going on again but I was crying then and no wonder and there, he said,’ said she extemporizing but she believed now he had said it, which he never had, “well Lil it’s goodbye now,” he says, “I ain’t no good, you’d better go ’ome.”’ (365)

Lily’s story has become a screen version of what she wishes had happened. Despite the strong imaginative faculties ascribed to her, Lily cannot do better than these flat lines – which essentially shows how language and thought were in the process of being made uniform, its class content reduced by the cinema, which united ‘mass on

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<sup>178</sup> C.F.G. Masterman, *From the Abyss* (London: Johnson, 1902), p. 18.

mass' (345) in a similar language. When one of the workers at the tennis club begins a phrase 'Boy,' the narrator tells us where this comes: 'said Mr Tarver, imitating American slang he saw at the movies' (241). In the factory, though, Tarver's speech will be imitated by Dick: "'Good-morning Tarver, how are we this morning,'" said Mr Richard, hearty, thinking he was using Mr Tarver's language' (321). Tarver's response, a mocking 'Why squire,' shows him calling out this affected language but also has a good-natured humour to it (321). The narrator's direct presence in these scenes, which is so unusual in the novel, shows Green wanting to place emphasis upon language's complicated history and continual circulation. By pointing to the processes and mediums threatening to standardize language, the novel attempts to reclaim the speech of the working class.

### **Conclusion**

When Green began *Living*, there was very little in terms of British socialist fiction. His engagement with the working class and his immersion into Birmingham working-class culture were a critical moment of artistic self-definition. The metropolitan confronting the provincial, long a literary trope, was something he sought to avoid. Dealing with a life he did not know, he was forced to consider the purpose of the novel and how it conveys meaning. The means by which it represents life but does not transcend it became the driving force behind *Living*. Green sought to give workers a voice that the traditional bourgeois novel had not given them, but

doing so also required steering clear of the facile realism of proletarian writing which would fail to animate their lives. The narrative techniques which served this purpose in *Living* were continued in his later novels, which the next chapter will investigate more closely.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SITES OF AUTHORITY

In ‘A Novelist to His Readers’, a two-part BBC radio broadcast delivered from ‘inside a sort of tomb’ (and later published in the *Listener* in November 1950 and March 1951), Henry Green expounded his views of the novel.<sup>1</sup> Publicly talking about craft was, for him, an unusual move. While contemporary writers like Auden, Day-Lewis, Eliot, Forster, Greene, Isherwood, Lawrence, Orwell, Spender, and Woolf intervened in critical debates, Green was ‘never an essayist, propagandist or journalist.’<sup>2</sup> That, though, changed with the BBC talks, which gave some direction to his underlying theory of the novel. They are a useful starting point for approaching his narrative practice but are not, as some critics have thought, definitive statements of his novelistic praxis.<sup>3</sup> No author can be expected to fully abide by a set of critical injunctions, even those, or perhaps especially those, of his own making, as Eliot came to admit.<sup>4</sup> This chapter analyses Green’s fictional techniques but goes beyond a

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<sup>1</sup> Green, ‘A Novelist to His Readers: I’, in *Surviving*, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> Stokes, *Novels of Henry Green*, p. 7. See also Swinden, *English Novel of History and Society*, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> Harkness, ‘The Lucky Crowd’, p. 389. See also Holmesland, *Critical Introduction*, pp. 2-5, Phelps, ‘Vision of Henry Green’, p. 620, and Stead, ‘Name’s Familiar’, pp. 613-4.

<sup>4</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘To Criticize the Critic’ (1961), in *To Criticize the Critic, and Other Writings* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 16.

formal narratological study by examining the relationship between form and social context, and more particularly, the link between narrative and political authority.

When Green calls prose ‘a long intimacy between strangers with no direct appeal to what both may have known’ (*PMB*, 84), his terms are similar to Maurice Blanchot’s definition of the literary: ‘the work is a work only when it becomes the intimacy shared by someone who writes it and someone who reads it, a space violently opened up by the contest between the power to speak and the power to hear.’<sup>5</sup> The ambivalent relationship between writer, reader, and means of self-presentation is a useful starting point to consider what Gibson calls Green’s ‘abdication of [narrative] authority’.<sup>6</sup> This view is shared by a number of critics, but how Green’s narrative renunciation works and where it comes from have not been closely examined.

I begin by examining Green’s reconfiguration of the narrator’s role. His distrust of omniscience leads to a striking emphasis on the undefined, ambiguous and obscure. There are few authoritative statements or positions, so if his fiction is ‘hard to read’, it is because it asks much more of the reader in untangling the plot and evaluating characters.<sup>7</sup> This first section analyses Green’s handling of a number of narrative devices, such as back story, delayed information and dialogue. After this I look at his views of authorship, a topic intimately linked to the idea of authority. Green’s questioning of authorship as an institutional practice sets him apart from a

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<sup>5</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. by Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> Gibson, ‘Henry Green as Experimental Novelist’, p. 205.

<sup>7</sup> Carlson, ‘Readers Reading Green Reading Readers’, p. 175.

number of modernist writers, who continued the Romantic tradition of seeing the artist as a visionary. I first examine the moment when Green had the strongest incentive for a powerful authorial presence, the ‘self-portrait’ *Pack My Bag*, and argue that the author deliberately hides himself. The personal guilt which structures the work is connected to the larger guilt that writing, and by implication, authorship, implies. I then analyse a more pronounced distortion of authorship, a forged passage in the middle of *Back*. This disfiguration of the novel’s integrity and the author’s creative dignity, decried by Evelyn Waugh in a personal letter to Green, is even more flagrant since the passage is not introduced as a forgery but is passed off as genuine, which puts into question the value of ‘original’ authorship. I conclude this chapter with a section on fictions of authority concerning education. The school as a geographic site, prominent in both *Blindness* and *Concluding*, plays a meta-theoretical role in defining the scope of the novel and its traditionally pedagogic purpose.

### **The Dynamics of Narrative Authority**

Wayne Booth argues that modern novelists and critics are distinguished by their view that ‘direct and authoritative rhetoric’ is illegitimate: there can be no ‘unambiguous bestowal of authority’ upon the narrator.<sup>8</sup> Such a move is related to larger social changes. For Irving Babbit (Eliot’s teacher at Harvard), modernity is a

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<sup>8</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 6, 18.



‘positive and critical spirit ... [which] refuses to take things on authority.’<sup>9</sup> W.H. Auden introduced *Oxford Poetry 1927* by speaking of ‘the chaos of values which is the substance of our environment.’<sup>10</sup> In the mid-1930s, Harold Laski spoke of ‘the Indian summer of authority’ as society went from one economic and political crisis to another.<sup>11</sup> During the Second World War, Karl Mannheim observed that there was no longer any means of ‘justifying authority’ because tradition and God were dismissed by most people; by the 1950s, Hannah Arendt noted that ‘authority has vanished from the modern world.’<sup>12</sup> While Arendt lamented the loss this entailed for democratic politics, a series of prominent post-war thinkers, many of them deeply affected by the historical legacy of fascism and Nazism, argued that authority was inherently dangerous. These figures, coming from a variety of fields, included cultural theorists like T.H. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, sociologists like David Riesman and C. Wright Mills, and psychologists like R.D. Laing and Erich Fromm.

But narrative authority, as Booth has shown, is inescapable. Gérard Genette notes that even ‘in the most unobtrusive narrative, someone is speaking to me, telling

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<sup>9</sup> Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), p. xi.

<sup>10</sup> Auden, ‘Preface to *Oxford Poetry 1927*’, in *Complete Works of W.H. Auden*, I, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Harold J. Laski, *The State in Theory and Practice* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1935), p. 123. Laski had earlier written, as a twin companion to his work on sovereignty, *Authority in the Modern State* (1927). When speaking about the crisis of values and authority in the early 1930s, he noted: ‘The crisis of capitalist democracy is essentially a crisis of authority and discipline. The power to secure obedience to its principles has decreased because men increasingly refuse to accept its ends as obviously just ... Disrespect for authority is not due to some sudden burst of enthusiasm for anarchy; it is rooted in a disbelief in the principles for which authority has been organised in a capitalist society.’ See Laski, *Democracy in Crisis* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1933), p. 147.

<sup>12</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Diagnosis of Our Time: Wartime Essays of a Sociologist* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1943), p. 21; Hannah Arendt, ‘What Is Authority?’ in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 1993), p. 91

me a story, is inviting me to listen to it as he tells it'.<sup>13</sup> For Walter Ong, '[a]bout any work of literature, it is legitimate to ask who is saying what to whom. To treat any work exhaustively, this question must always ultimately be asked. Without addressing oneself to this question, it would appear impossible to judge the value of any utterance ....'<sup>14</sup> Pierre Bourdieu's reformulation of this enquiry calls for an investigation into 'what authorizes the author, what creates the authority with which authors authorize'.<sup>15</sup> In his study of modernist authority, Mark Conroy writes, 'The first order of business for a discourse is to establish itself as a discourse. It must gain ascendancy over the attention of the addressee.'<sup>16</sup> The narrator's role in establishing this ascendancy is primordial for evaluating a text's fictional claims.

Green believed that novelistic form could not be developed in isolation from social practices but had to reflect and engage them. In his first published piece of literary criticism, a short study of C.M. Doughty that appeared in John Lehmann's *Folios of New Writing* in 1941, Green called upon authors to adapt their forms and styles to the changing times.<sup>17</sup> The loss of public certainties was high on the list of changes forcing authors to look past conventional methods. Moreover, Green's care in making form suitable to every work makes it difficult to speak of a Greenian narrator, a term that must include the diary novelist in *Blindness*, the cinema-director

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<sup>13</sup> Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 101.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Ong, 'From Mimesis to Irony: The Distancing of Voice', *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 9 (1976), 1-24 (pp. 2-3).

<sup>15</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. by Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 76.

<sup>16</sup> Mark Conroy, *Modernism and Authority: Strategies of Legitimation in Flaubert and Conrad* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> Green, 'Apologia', in *Surviving*, pp. 90-97.

of *Living*, the explicator and storyteller of *Caught*, the pasticheur of Jamesian central consciousness in *Back*, and the dialogue novelist of *Nothing* and *Doting*. Despite this variety, which Edward Stokes observed statistically in the late 1950s, the evolution of Green's fictional practice appears to be one of decreasing narrative presence: from the starting point of a diary novel, the final books end with a narrator doing little more than recording dialogue.<sup>18</sup> Such a broad picture gives the false impression that Green began with a wholly subjective, impressionist narrator and what followed was a steady effacement of narrative presence.

In this section I analyse the diversity of narrative techniques within Green's fiction. I first examine *Blindness* and *Living* to show how he overturns expectations raised by genre. Rather than relying upon an interventionist narrator, the diary novel in *Blindness* questions the basic presumptions of narrative authority, while *Living*'s narrative reticence in doing more than introducing a scene and setting action into motion obscures a very strong narrative presence. I then examine his use of back story. A number of critics observe that Green's characters have indefinable pasts but do not examine how this occurs; I explain this by looking at his handling of back story, a theoretically underdeveloped area of narratology. This leads me to consider how dialogue in Green's novels undermines teleological narration. Finally, I conclude by looking at his use of delayed information, an example of hidden narrative control.

*Absence and Presence: The Narrators of Blindness and Living*

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<sup>18</sup> See Stokes, *Novels of Henry Green*, Chapter 3.

Lorna Martens argues that the diary novel ‘is mimetic of what could be a real situation. No other form of narration can achieve comparable closeness between the narrator and the narrated world without being identifiably fictive.’<sup>19</sup> It is ‘mimetic’ because, like in the epistolary novel, the writing occurs amidst the narrated events, turning the writer into both participant and observer. While such a position may seem to undermine the text’s authority, its credibility comes from the writer being situated closer to real life than an omniscient narrator. Yet it is authoritative because in a diary the writer filters the action and other voices. By definition, the diary is a space for a single author. There are no competing accounts of the reality it offers, so the diary is a space where the writer cannot be challenged.

Martens does not consider Green’s use of the form in *Blindness*, but his case would not fit her expectations of the genre. Rather than creating intimacy between author and reader through an authoritative teller, any such bond is estranged by the diary in *Blindness*. The impersonal, factual heading – ‘Diary of John Haye, Secretary to the Noat Art Society, and in J.W.P.’s House at the Public School of Noat’ – coupled with the approximation of the first entry – ‘6 July (about)’ – is the first sign of how the intimacy of the diary novel, as well as the built-in authority of its teller, who cannot conclusively date its chronology, will be undermined.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Lorna Martens, *The Diary Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 5-6.

<sup>20</sup> Most of the diary matches up closely to public events (15 November 1922 as polling day) and to such banal facts as the weather (when John Haye goes to military camp, in August 1922, he writes, ‘It has been raining viciously as if with a purpose’ [344]; the day the Eton contingent arrived at Tidworth, two and a half inches of rain fell, a record at the time). Despite this, there are a few problems of dating within the diary. The entry for ‘Good Friday’ is after the entry for 1 April, but in 1923 Good Friday was 30 March and 1 April was Easter Sunday. The entry for 19 March, on page 361, notes that ‘the day after the day after tomorrow’ will be Saturday, but in 1923 19 March was a Monday, so the date in question would be Thursday. Finally, the letter from B.G. to Seymour, which

While some diaries look outside of their subject and towards a larger society (Pepys and Boswell, but also Anne Frank and the fictional Bridget Jones), as a genre the diary is traditionally supposed to lead to greater self-awareness. In its Protestant roots, best exemplified in such works as Mary Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682), George Fox's *Journal* (posthumously published in 1694), and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), the diary charts the struggle for inward grace and redemption. André Gide, who followed in this Protestant tradition, has Eveline observe in *L'école des femmes* (1929): 'I shall write in order to help myself put a little order in my thought; in order to try to see into myself clearly'.<sup>21</sup> For the atheist Roquentin in Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausée* (1938), a simplified version of Gide's phrase becomes phenomenological in defining the genre: 'To keep a journal to see clearly'.<sup>22</sup> While Roquentin's quest for clear vision ends in failure, it is only through the diary that he comes to understand the impossibility of that goal, which means that the diary does lead to greater self-knowledge, even if it is only a kind of Socratic ignorance.

John Haye, on the other hand, never looks closely at himself and, by the end of the novel, cannot: 'His face, that awful face. He didn't know what scars he had, poor boy' (470).<sup>23</sup> Physical blindness, though, is the logical result of the blindness that plagues John's diary. One reason for this is that John's self-image in the diary is

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announces John Haye's blindness, is dated Saturday 7 April. The chronology of the diary makes us assume that the year should be 1924, but 7 April was a Saturday in 1923, not 1924.

<sup>21</sup> André Gide, *L'École des femmes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1944 [1929]), p. 53.

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> According to John Hull, one of the great tragedies of blindness is the dematerialization of the body: 'the horror of being faceless, of forgetting one's own appearance, of having no face. The face is the mirror-image of the self'. See John M. Hull, *Touching the Rock: An Experience of Blindness* (London: SPCK, 1990), p. 41.

mediated through the eyes of others. The diary begins with a trespass, two boys entering John's room without his permission, and the boys in his House become 'rather alarmed and contemptuous' when they find out that he is keeping a diary (346). The privacy of the diarist writing for only his or her eyes, a key element in establishing the authority of the diarist, is overturned.

An even more important factor undermining the sincerity of John's diary is its stated motivation: 'It has only just struck me that a kind of informal diary would be rather fun' (343). There is a kind of mockery of the diary's mirror function, for John's decision to keep one is a lark; that it 'struck' him further shows this, for that verb is related to his blindness – when he first learns that he is blind, his first reaction is '[s]o he was blind, how funny' (370). The self-consciousness of making the diary 'informal' also undermines its sincerity, as the books John Hays esteems within it are journals, diaries, and letters – works that are generally supposed to be private. His own diary emulates these works; so instead of an inwardly-oriented account, John's diary is being written with an eye to future publication, a point buttressed when considering his own ambitions towards professional authorship. David Gascoyne, who began keeping a journal in the mid-1930s, noted this problem of audience for the diary writer: 'In order to be able to continue writing this one I have to have some imaginary audience in view. You are reading this? But I had to pretend that no one would ever read it.'<sup>24</sup> In *Blindness* the account is not of the diurnal or of

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<sup>24</sup> David Gascoyne, *Collected Journals 1936-42* (London: Skoob Books, 1991), p. 9. Lady Cynthia Asquith, a near relation of Green's, similarly began her journal by stating this problem: 'In any case I am entirely devoid of the gift of sincerity, and could never write as though I were really convinced no

himself but rather an account made to appear so: there is always that difference between private writing and John's imitation of it.

The authority of the diary in *Blindness* is further undermined by the abrupt manner in which it is broken off, disrupting the genre's unifying propulsion. The diary ends with the '[e]xtract of a letter written by B.G. to Seymour', even though, according to Martens' analysis, John's classmates should not be allowed to occupy a space reserved for the diarist. By announcing John's permanent blindness, this letter also downplays the preceding events and concerns, which now seem incomparably minor. Its content, revealing the physical assault to John's bodily integrity, is mirrored formally: the letter closes off the diary, which is, above all, a physical object, a container of experience. Rather than presenting a concentrated, single authority, the diary has to compete with the ensuing narrative, in which John Haye is one character among many. The diary has also failed to establish John's personality. While the diary concluding *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* shows Stephen's triumphant development of an artistic mission and his appropriation of a language that up till then had been foreign, John Haye's diary is a false starting point that must be surmounted. He never returns to it, and the closure that such a return could provide is never sought. If anything, the diary can only be returned to as a physical object, a book with covers and pages, but John cannot read his entries. He can only re-appropriate his words if someone else reads them to him, but this would undermine the presumptive privacy of the original writing – which strengthens my

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other eye would ever [read] what I wrote. I am incurably self-conscious.' See her *Diaries, 1915-1918* (London: Hutchinson, 1968), p. 3.

reading of John's diary-writing as intended not for himself but for others. The diary is sealed off, and not only does John never return to it, but he never expresses any desire to, which in effect marks it as an aesthetic failure. If the *Künstlerroman* is, as Norma Bouchard argues, 'modernity's favorite genre to reestablish the authority of the artist and his or her privileged function in a time of auratic decay,' then Green has shown its limitations.<sup>25</sup>

While the diary novel in *Blindness* turns out to be less authoritative than it initially appears, narrative presence in *Living* turns out to be more powerful than on first inspection. The silencing of the traditional narrative voice can be coupled to Green's status as an outsider, who in foreign surroundings cannot muster the necessary authority and who in his sensitivity to class questions cannot speak for others. The ostensible stand-in for Green, Dick Dupret, fails to assert authority in the factory:

'No, we're going to talk now. The point is this, when I say we're going to talk, we're going to talk, from now on.'

'Well, you ain't going to make me talk,' Mr Bridges said and walked out. (324)

The novel's unobtrusive opening line – 'Bridesley, Birmingham' – prepares the reader for minimal narrative commentary and intervention. But already here the narrator cannot be effaced, for, as Green later bemoaned, 'names distract' (*PMB*, 84). Suggestive naming is an instance of narrative presence if names 'designate, class, and describe' – like Anna Tellwright in Arnold Bennett's *Anna of the Five Towns*

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<sup>25</sup> Norma Bouchard, *Céline, Gadda, Beckett: Experimental Writings of the 1930s* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), p. 31.



(1902).<sup>26</sup> This was also a tactic Green employed in *Living*, though more subtly. The characters are rooted in place by their topographic names: Bridges, Gates, Dale, with Craigan perhaps derived from ‘crag’. These Anglo-Saxon names are contrasted to Dupret, whose Gallic meaning, ‘of the meadow/field’ (*du pré*), is hinted at when Dick thinks of how ‘a landscape by Claude echoes’ (229).<sup>27</sup> The bucolic, foreign name casts doubt on the family’s ability to possess urban Bridesley. When passing through the district, Dick sees nothing; the workers consider him as a ‘dandy’ come to ‘interfere’ (213).

One consequence of the limited narrative presence in *Living* is that occasions of narrative intervention become more powerful. When Bert Jones leaves Lily Gates in Liverpool, the tense changes: ‘He had remembered great tall street which should be near to them to the west. Trams ran down it. He leads her there’ (361). The chapter ends in the next paragraph with Bert running away:

He stopped by lamp post where trams stopped. She stopped. Then he sees she is crying quietly. He comes close to her and she leans a little on him. He stood so for a bit then he said, ‘Lil, here’s your bag.’ Without thinking, she was all blank, she reached down to pick it up. She looks up to him then. But he was running away down this street. (361-2)

The abrupt change in tense extends out the scene for dramatic emphasis, as the line ‘[t]ear drops off her chin’ shows: that tear does not seem to stop falling. The scene ends in the simple past, ‘[p]oliceman turned away’, a phrase which matches the

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<sup>26</sup> Michel Erman, *Poétique du personnage de roman* (Paris: Ellipses, 2006), p. 46. See also Stead, ‘Name’s Familiar’, for a more general review of naming in Green.

<sup>27</sup> While Green disliked the study of Anglo-Saxon, two of Birmingham’s famous literary sons, Tolkien (who taught Green at Oxford in the subject) and Auden, were intrigued by it. In Auden’s *Paid on Both Sides* (1928), written around the time when he was living in Birmingham, the place names are distinctly Anglo-Saxon (Colefangs, Rookhope, Brandon Walls, Hammergeill, Eickhamp, and Garrigill). See W.H. Auden, *Paid on Both Sides*, in *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), pp. 1-20.

abruptness of that physical motion and also, in its closure, signals the desperation of Lily's condition, who has been jilted by her lover and is now stranded in a strange city. Yet the use of the present tense connects the scene to one where Lily is waking up, which is also in the present tense: 'When Lily wakes, her eyelids fold up and her two eyes soft, brutal with sleep blink out on what is too bright for them at first. She stirs a little in the warmness of bed. Then, eyes waking, she sees clearly about her and stretches' (256). Lily is wavering between two lovers, Jim Dale or Bert Jones, and comes to choose the latter. The use of the present tense when Bert deserts Lily, then, is not simply a desire to extend the scene but also a way to connect that event with Lily's fateful choice earlier.

Another example of subtle narrative intervention comes in the middle of Chapter Two: 'Eight o'clock of morning. Thousands came up the road to work and few turned in to Mr Dupret's factory.' (217). The lines seem straightforward, doing nothing more than setting a scene in motion. Yet 'few' takes on greater meaning because at the novel's opening an almost identical line had 'some'. The repetition of the phrase signals the end of a cycle, or, more specifically, the end of the *incipit*. And, indeed, by this point all of the novel's major themes and characters have been introduced.<sup>28</sup> A simple change of adjective provides structure to a novel whose narrator is otherwise barred from explicitly doing so. In sum, the interventionist narrator brings out subtleties that stage directions and a recording microphone

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<sup>28</sup> Green's theory of novelistic openings was quite strict, as he related in an interview: 'In English law a practitioner can't depart from his opening statement. I have to make my opening statement and for the remaining seven-eighths of the novel revolve around it.' *New York Times Book Review*, 19 February 1950, p. 29

cannot, but when it does this, its presence is more strongly felt. Green later observed that ‘the more you leave out, the more you highlight what you leave in’.<sup>29</sup> In all of these examples, while the narrator has laid the foundations, the reader’s active involvement is needed to see the overlapping lines, understand the connection, and draw these conclusions, effectively making it so that only individuals deep inside the text – the characters themselves, as well as the reader – have a voice.

### *The Many Voices of Dialogue*

Andrew Gibson notes that one element of ‘Green’s abdication of [narrative] authority’ is the ‘reluctan[ce] to privilege the narrator’s language over characters’ language.’<sup>30</sup> While Gibson is content to provide a few examples, I am more interested in theoretically extending out the implications of this position. Monologicistic narration tends towards order and coherence; it is teleological, a purposive movement from one place to another. Dialogue in Green’s novels, though, is sloppy and inconsequential, rarely leading to a determined point. Unlike the dialogue of bourgeois novels, which with its rounded paragraphs, clearly struck semicolons and well-placed modifiers is often no different from monologue, Green’s dialogue abounds in hesitations, deflecting comments and unanswered questions.<sup>31</sup> It is not, though, a record of spoken English. Of ‘a gramophone record’ of conversation, Green notes that ‘possibly nothing would be more untypical or boring

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<sup>29</sup> Green, ‘Art of Fiction’, in *Surviving*, p. 246.

<sup>30</sup> Gibson, *Reading Narrative Discourse*, p. 126.

<sup>31</sup> On how spoken speech, with its abruptness, hesitations, and digressions, is made coherent in novelistic dialogue, see Norman Page, *Speech in the English Novel* (London: Longman, 1973), p. 130.

... Art must intrude.’<sup>32</sup> This art allows speech to go beyond a singular meaning, as Lichtenberg had understood: ‘I have found that we enunciate the phrase *Es ist gut* in five different ways and each time with a different meaning, which is, to be sure, often also determined by a third variable quantity, namely facial expression.’<sup>33</sup> This refers to dialogue’s referential quality, but as Bakhtin observed, in dialogue we must direct our attention not only to truth statements (‘what a beautiful sunset’ makes a claim about the universe) but also how it goes ‘toward *another’s discourse*, toward *someone else’s speech*’, which means that the comment about the beautiful sunset is a response to another person or event, perhaps in order to cut short a story one finds boring, or to seduce, or for any other number of possible reasons.<sup>34</sup>

Green takes dialogue even further by not forcing upon it a synthesis of views but allows it to become, as Elizabeth Bowen observed, ‘an end in itself’.<sup>35</sup> Rather than the ‘semantic bond’ that Bakhtin felt two discourses enter into, Green allows dialogue to float as an end in itself.<sup>36</sup> Jane Weatherby manifests the flexible nature of language when confronted with a story about a house party: ‘But simply invented, every single word made up! I suppose people had much more time on their hands those days which made them so dangerous’ (*Nothing*, 47). The responsibility of speech lies with the characters, who enunciate the words they speak, but characters just as easily renounce the words they speak or alter them when it suits their

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<sup>32</sup> Green, ‘The Spoken Word as Written’ (1953), in *Surviving*, p. 170.

<sup>33</sup> Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *The Waste Books*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (New York: New York Review Books, 2000), pp. 8-9 (A:24).

<sup>34</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 185.

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, ‘Truth and Fiction’, in *Afterthought: Pieces about Writing* (London: Longmans, 1962), pp. 114-43 (p. 134).

<sup>36</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, p. 189.

purposes – very much like the great dialogue novels of Diderot. Dialogue, Green shows us, cannot force itself towards a particular goal because there is another actor in the scene whose own motives are different: ‘you must allow me my say’ (*Loving*, 162). And so character, through dialogue, is responsive to the situation, necessarily changing from one moment to another. Even when the characters have nothing to say, the fact that silence is abhorred means that they must speak – and so whatever they might say is false or irrelevant. They disguise their own voices to the point that when Sebastian in *Concluding* speaks ‘in his natural voice’, his interlocutor had heard this ‘so seldom that she was not sure to recognize it’ (79), for Sebastian speaks at times in ‘eighteenth-century speech’ (33), ‘in what he imagined to be cockney’ (78), ‘in his lecturer’s voice’ (166) and ‘in his parson’s voice’ (187).

In Green’s version of the dialogue novel, characters are always shifting, taking on the voices of others or other media: the young Penelope in *Nothing* will ‘copy the words out of one’s very mouth’ (19). I have already highlighted, in the previous chapter, how this occurs in *Living*. But dialogue’s circulation through a larger society is found throughout Green’s novels and is sometimes made explicit. In *Party Going*, the narrator sometimes intervenes to locate the origin of a certain phrase [‘using one of Claire’s expressions’ (449)].

If a character is formed through his or her speech, as in its root meaning as a written representation of speech, the problem is how the individual is forged out of the communal but hardly unified property that is language. What Green exposes in the dialogue novel is the major difficulty of assessing individuality, the point where

it comes to an impasse, which is the conflict between character and environment. Mary Pomfret dismisses heredity – the idea of abstract character, independent of circumstances and presumably fixed – by saying that ‘... it’s all a question of environment now’ (*Nothing*, 23). That ‘now,’ though, shows that her belief is not based on logic but authority, which is problematic: ‘I was taught the whole question of heredity had been exploded ages back,’ she continues. Later on, Mary will take her father’s voice – ‘Everything’s so hopeless’ (43) – and the position regarding character is no longer clear. Her environment and her heredity are coterminous and detaching herself from either is impossible.

The inability to maintain the privacy of language – to keep it as one’s own and also not to have one’s conversation with another repeated as gossip – is a continual struggle throughout *Party Going*, where the sense of enclosure and also the proximity of one dialogue giving away to another makes eavesdropping one of the text’s foundational strategies. Speaking from the corridor is greeted with horror because one fears that the hallway is littered with hotel detectives.<sup>37</sup> This concern with privacy and linguistic theft makes characters keen to possess their own language, which without vigilance may slip away: ‘She went on and as people will when they have just lied she began to speak out genuinely for once what she did really feel’ (502). The contrast between private and public speech also informs *Blindness*. As I have previously argued, John’s diary is mediated through the eyes of others in the public school setting: two boys trespass into John’s room and the

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<sup>37</sup> The joke is that the character the Bright Young People have identified as the hotel detective is no such thing. Limiting one’s speech because it may be overheard by, of all persons, a hotel detective, implies a kind of guilt in one’s speech.

existence of the diary is made public, leading John's classmates to mock him. *Loving* also relies upon this opposition between private speech and what can be overheard. It begins with the dying butler Eldon's calling out of the name 'Ellen' ringing through the house (18), while Raunce, who will come to replace Eldon as butler, is circumspect on being 'out of earshot' (24) when speaking to Albert, the pantry boy. So too is Miss Burch, who waits for Raunce to be 'out of earshot' before speaking (31) or Kate and Edith, who tell each other to lower their voices since 'anyone could hear' (45). This need for quiet and stealth in speaking is even more marked because, as the narrator highlights in a stand-alone paragraph, '[t]he passage carpet was so thick you never could hear anyone coming' (30). In all three novels, the confinement of physical space intensifies the language the characters use, which is always veering towards public speech even when the moment calls for intimacy. For Green's readers, there is always some discomfort in being consciously made to overhear characters futilely striving to keep their speech private.

#### *Back Story and Authorial Intervention*

If one accepts Hannah Arendt's argument that authority uses 'a foundation in the past as its unshaken cornerstone', then understanding narrative authority in Green's novels requires examining how the past is conceptualized within them.<sup>38</sup> Such an inquiry would be centred on back story, which is an essential element in developing

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<sup>38</sup> Arendt, 'What Is Authority?', p. 95.

narrative authority.<sup>39</sup> It is the most important formal structure in creating boundaries for fictional space because it answers the main questions of Quintilian's *inventio*: *quis? quid? ubi? quibus auxiliis? cur? quomodo? quando?*<sup>40</sup> These have to be answered for a fiction to be intelligible, as even Percy Lubbock, one of the fiercest critics of authorial intervention, admits. In *The Craft of Fiction* (1921), one of the most widely-read works among literary artists and critics in the period (and for Q.D. Leavis one of the two main books of criticism then current, the other being Henry James's *Notes on Novelists*),<sup>41</sup> Lubbock admits that sometimes the narrator must step in to supply information that frames the past: 'There comes a juncture at which, for some reason, it is necessary for us to know more than we could have made out by simply looking and listening. ... you cannot rightly understand this incident or this talk, the author implies, unless you know—what I now proceed to tell you.'<sup>42</sup> Lubbock's constant reference point for narrative mastery was Henry James, who was intensely interested in the aesthetic problems presented by back story, as were Ford Madox Ford and Joseph Conrad.<sup>43</sup> To tell a story, the King of Hearts tells Alice, one must '[b]egin at the beginning' – but if 'one may well as begin anywhere', as Forster lays out in *Howards End*, or if '[a] story has no beginning or end,' as Graham

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<sup>39</sup> Definitions of back story can be found in Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction*, 2nd edn (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1959), p. 684, and David Herman, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 275.

<sup>40</sup> Andrea Del Lungo, 'Pour une poétique de l'incipit', *Poétique*, 94 (April 1993), 131-52 (pp. 142-3).

<sup>41</sup> Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. xiii.

<sup>42</sup> Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1921), p. 65.

<sup>43</sup> Booth notes that James was 'the first to formulate clearly the aesthetic problem presented by bald factual summary'; see *Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 173.



Greene stated at the beginning of *The End of the Affair* (1951), then the King's advice raises questions that transcend technique.<sup>44</sup>

Contemporary narratology, while it offers a burgeoning study of narrative beginnings, has no theoretical model of back story.<sup>45</sup> Critics nonetheless concede that back story is an essential element of the novel. Meir Sternberg lays out why it is indispensable in terms similar to Lubbock's:

It is the function of exposition to introduce the reader into an unfamiliar world, the fictive world of the story, by providing him with the general and specific antecedents indispensable to the understanding of what happens in it. There are some pieces of information, varying in number and nature from one work to another, that the reader cannot do without.<sup>46</sup>

Paul Werth similarly argues that 'background information ... constructs the text world.'<sup>47</sup> Genette notes that an 'explicative turning back' after an *in medias res* opening has become a formal novelistic *topos*.<sup>48</sup> In the chapter 'In Medias Res' in Anthony Trollope's *The Duke's Children* (1880), the narrator concedes that beginning amidst the action puts 'the cart before the horse', with the result that 'a certain nebulous darkness gradually seems to envelope the characters and the

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<sup>44</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, ed. by Roger Lancelyn Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 106; Forster, *Howards End*, p. 19; Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair* (London: Heinemann, 1951), p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> On narrative beginnings, see Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); A.D. Nuttall, *Openings: Narrative Beginnings from the Epic to the Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Del Lungo, 'Pour une poétique de l'incipit'; Jean-Louis Morhange, 'Incipit narratifs: L'entrée du lecteur dans l'univers de la fiction', *Poétique*, 104 (November 1995), 387-410; James Phelan, 'Beginnings and Endings: Theories and Typologies of How Novels Open and Close', in *Encyclopedia of the Novel*, ed. by Paul Schellinger (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998), pp. 96-99; and Brian Richardson, ed., *Narrative Beginnings: Theories and Practices* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008). For a recent attempt to theorize back story, see my 'The Forms and Functions of Back Story in the Novel', *Narrative*, 18 (2010), 347-66.

<sup>46</sup> Meir Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Werth, *Text Worlds: Representing Conceptual Space in Discourse* (London: Longman, 1999), p. 119.

<sup>48</sup> Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 79.

incidents’ – until, it is implied, these are filled in through back story.<sup>49</sup> In *The Prime Minister* (1875-6), Trollope explicitly demarcates back story from action proper: ‘The reader must submit to be told one or two further and still smaller details respecting the man, and then the man shall be allowed to make his own way.’<sup>50</sup>

With its vocabulary of the reader’s submission to the narrator’s mastery and control of the relevant information, Trollope’s statement relates back story to narrative authority. The reader cannot come to grips with the text until the narrator temporally and spatially frames the fictional space. Information that even the characters may not have can be provided to readers through an intrusive narrator: ‘Her age shall be no secret to the reader, though to her most intimate friends ... it had never been divulged.’<sup>51</sup> There is also an implicit psychological assumption about human character and history in the traditional employment of back story. The past can be separated from the present, a point seen in some of the chapter titles in *Tom Jones* (1749): ‘In which the History goes backward’ (Book 10, Chapter 8); ‘In which the History is obliged to look back’ (Book 16, Chapter 6). It also assumes that a summary will suffice in doing this; George Eliot, in the opening lines of *Adam Bede* (1859), longs for ‘a single drop of ink’ to present ‘far-reaching visions of the past.’<sup>52</sup>

Compartmentalizing the past as a separate, neatly-defined space came to be considered by modernist writers as insufficient and simplistic. The past could not be summarily presented but required a full-scale investigation. The growing importance

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<sup>49</sup> Anthony Trollope, *The Duke’s Children* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973 [1880]), p. 70.

<sup>50</sup> Anthony Trollope, *The Prime Minister* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973 [1875-6]), p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Anthony Trollope, *The Way We Live Now* (New York: Knopf, 1950 [1875]), p. 5.

<sup>52</sup> George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. by Carol A. Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 [1859]), p. 5.

of psychoanalysis contributed to this belief, as Freud and his followers argued that the mental make-up of the adult stemmed from an obscure, repressed past whose unveiling was necessary in order to comprehend the psychological make-up of the individual. The influence of psychoanalysis on modernism has been well-documented, but I would like to focus here on how the past was formally treated through back story. The modernist catchphrase for the importance of the past could come from E.M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* (1927): '[I]t is the function of the novelist to reveal the hidden life at its source.'<sup>53</sup> For some modernists, the source meant the past, which was no longer a single set of facts but an awesome edifice of staggering complexity whose full exploration could no longer be done summarily but often became the focus of the novel itself – this meant taking as a model for the novel not *Robinson Crusoe* but *Tristram Shandy*.<sup>54</sup> While not beginning *ab ovo*, the generational cycle comprising Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (1901) was based upon the notion that the changes and development of a fin-de-siècle personality could only be understood by meticulously uncovering the past. In *Sons and Lovers* (1913), D.H. Lawrence modifies the *Bildungsroman* to include a number of chapters before the birth of its protagonist, Paul Morel.

It is Woolf, though, who is synonymous with investigating the past as a source of present conduct. She famously argued that the variety of encumbered objects in the Edwardian novel only served to deflect attention from the character of

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<sup>53</sup> E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955 [1927]), p. 45.

<sup>54</sup> As Forster wrote of Lawrence Sterne in 1926: 'His lubricity very intelligent. Birth then – as still now – an unexplored field for the novelist. Love a tickling feeling. Unreality of time. Supremacy of indecision in human life. All these make him "modern" – cf. Proust & Joyce as well as Butler.' See his *Commonplace Book*, ed. by Philip Gardner (Aldershot, UK: Wildwood House, 1988), p. 3.

a fictional Mrs Brown, which cannot be given by the house she lives in, her servants, or her hot-water bottle. While Woolf's fiction removes the heavy weight of matter, the past is the fount from which present character emerges, a source of infinite wonder and complexity:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad of impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms ... Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incidence scores upon the consciousness.<sup>55</sup>

From the death of Clarissa Dalloway's sister, the five centuries spanned in *Orlando* (1928) to the entire structure of *The Waves* (1931) in its calling for the presence of the invisible Percival, back story becomes critical in dissolving the simplicity of character in the bourgeois novel.

What makes Green's fiction unique is that it constantly points to the past yet steadfastly avoids authoritative answers about it.<sup>56</sup> The lack of any definable back story is best exemplified by the words of the waiter Pascal in *Nothing*: 'they are not your people, they are any peoples sir, they come here now like this, we do not know them Mr Pomfret', to which John Pomfret's response is addressed to Pascal's 'retreating back' (13). This sly allusion not only to back story but also to *Back* is telling, as that novel is the one most concerned with untangling the pressures of the past upon the present. Hans Blumenberg's understanding of the motif of turning

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<sup>55</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', in *Common Reader, First Series* (London: Hogarth Press, 1957 [1925]), pp. 189-90.

<sup>56</sup> See Russell, *Nine Novels*, p. 19; James Hall, 'The Fiction of Henry Greene [sic]: Paradoxes of Pleasure-and-Pain', *Kenyon Review*, 19.1 (Winter 1957), 76-88 (p. 77).

‘back’ is pertinent: ‘As humans our frontal optics make us creatures with a lot of “back,” who have to live under the condition that a large part of reality lies behind us and is something that we have to leave behind us.’<sup>57</sup> While surely much of life must be forgotten, Charley Summers takes an extreme view of this. He wobbles in the now and what has happened is as confusing to the reader as it is unclear in Charley’s mind. That a great deal of repression is happening is obvious: when speaking about the obsessive personality, Freud noted that ‘[p]eople of this type are dominated by fear of their conscience instead of fear of losing love.’<sup>58</sup> Yet the novel does not provide an entry point into Charley’s conscience, because the minimal back story provided – a mouse in the prisoner-of-war camp, the letters written by Rose – consists of banal moments that only raise further questions: what else was there but the mouse, what kind of love had there been to produce such dreary letters? The absence of a definitive back story is also marked in *Nothing*, where it does no good to ‘dredge back into the past’ (*Nothing*, 27) because characters will go on living as they always do. Indeed, the last words of *Doting*, Green’s final novel, are: ‘The next day they all went on very much the same’ (337).

Green is moving away from the novel of crisis, wherein characters are confronted with the extraordinary, and towards the novel of stasis, in which characters are defined by the routine and everyday. Mrs Tennant announces at the beginning of *Loving* that ‘[w]e’re really in enemy country here’ (23), but the novel quickly turns to the mundane reality of keeping up the house – the next words out of

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<sup>57</sup> Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. by Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1986), pp. 175-6.

<sup>58</sup> Freud, ‘Libidinal Types’ (1931), in *Standard Edition*, XXI, 218.

Mrs Tennant's mouth are to ask Raunce to find her misplaced gardening glove. The move away from the novel of crisis and towards that of the everyday is even true for *Caught*. Despite being set in the Blitz and involving an element from the past in which a child is abducted, the novel is largely focused on routines and institutions, which is announced in the preface: 'This book is about the Auxiliary Fire Service ....' It is also, of all of Green's novels, the one with the greatest amount of traditional exposition (its opening paragraph provides formulaic exposition in such lines as 'Christopher, who was five', '[h]is father, a widower' [1]) and narrative intervention (the parentheses used when recounting the story of Christopher's abduction at the novel's opening and those employed in the conclusion, when Richard Roe is talking about what it is like to fight a fire). If anything, the past in *Caught* is debilitating, as Roe's obsession about it leads to his suicide.<sup>59</sup>

The vision of the past as ever-present, codifying inescapable routines, conflicts with Green's otherwise staunch refusal to provide an authoritative exposition. There are two possible interpretations of the influence of the past in Green's fiction. The first is that it fails to impress in any particular manner because it is indefinite and undefined, too weighty to be broken down into discrete elements and too all-encompassing to be noticed at any particular moment. The cause of everything, the past is, in effect, the cause of nothing: any causal claim made between the past and behaviour in the present is simplistic. The other view would see the past not as fixed but contingent, changing due to the pressures of the day, which

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<sup>59</sup> On the past as a 'trap' in *Caught*, see Paul Veyret, 'Le Mémoire piégée: CAUGHT de Henry Green', *Études Britanniques contemporaines*, 9 (June 1996), 41-54.

makes it no past at all. Every year John Pomfret asks his daughter, Mary, if she misses her mother, and every year she gives ‘a different answer’ (*Nothing*, 33). When Mary is about to find out something about her mother, the man who can supply that information, Arthur Morris, dies – the infection in his toe having spread to his leg and then his entire body, a kind of metaphorical spiral of malfeasance and infestation that cuts off any inquiry into a knowing and determinate past. The connection between past and present – the fulcrum of classical narrative which orders the unfolding events, and the model of clarity and cohesiveness that Musil pitted against the messiness of life at the start of *The Man without Qualities* (1930, 1942) – not a work Green would have known but which in its capturing of a certain attitude of the post-war *Zeitgeist* would have been familiar – no longer exists for the characters and appears even hazier from the outside.

### *On Delaying Information*

The traditional method of presenting back story was as a concentrated chunk at the beginning of a novel: ‘Of Mr. *Joseph Andrews* his Birth, Parentage, Education, and great Endowments, with a Word or two concerning Ancestors’ (Book I, Chapter 2).<sup>60</sup> Compact, narrator-provided exposition, though, tended to be artificial and aesthetically displeasing; as Sternberg writes, it is an ‘inevitable bad business’, what

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<sup>60</sup> Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, ed. by R.F. Brissenden (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977 [1742]), p. 41.

Holden Caulfield calls that ‘David Copperfield kind of crap.’<sup>61</sup> While the information back story gave had to be included for the story to make sense, a number of modernist writers sought to innovate how it was presented. Ford Madox Ford, in his book on Conrad, argued that novelists should ‘distribute’ information throughout the novel, ‘to get in the character first with a strong impression, and then work backwards and forwards over his past.’<sup>62</sup> As an example of this, Leon Edel observes that in Dorothy Richardson’s *Pointed Roofs* (1915) ‘forty pages must be read before we discover that Miriam’s last name is Henderson, and we learn that she is seventeen after half a hundred pages.’<sup>63</sup> Distributed back story approximates Jurij Lotman’s notion that the reader ‘builds up’ the text world through the course of the reading.<sup>64</sup>

Green used this technique of delayed information throughout his novels, even in *Blindness*, the most conventionally narrated of his novels. The ‘Mother’ John refers to in his diary is actually his step-mother, and only later do we find out that his biological mother died when he was quite young. His father, mentioned fleetingly in the diary, is revealed to be dead later in the text and further information, such as how he died (382) and his military service in India (449), is spread throughout the text. The biological link between John and his father, epilepsy, comes out in the last pages. Nan’s real name (449), John’s stepmother not being on speaking terms with her many brothers and sisters (452), Nan’s dead twin sister (453), Mabel Palmer as

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<sup>61</sup> Sternberg, *Expositional Modes*, p. 46; J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951), p. 3.

<sup>62</sup> Ford Madox Ford, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (London: Duckworth, 1924), p. 130.

<sup>63</sup> Leon Edel, *The Modern Psychological Novel* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), p. 15.

<sup>64</sup> Jurij Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, trans. by Ronald Vroon (Ann Arbor: Department of Slavic Languages and Literature, University of Michigan, 1977), p. 255.



not so much a village acquaintance but one from India (482), Nan's death (485): all of this information is supplied after the exposition.

But these are relatively minor examples of a much more radical technique, whereby the distribution of back story creates a forced re-reading. When certain information overturns the main narrative thrust, the reader is required to revise the current reading. While Booth has argued that eleventh-hour revelations breach the compact between writer and reader ('[W]e are likely to feel cheated when we discover that facts are held back for no good reason ... What right has the narrator to tell us this much and not to tell us the remainder of what he knows?'), Green's use of this technique does not deceive.<sup>65</sup> Rather, his late revelation of back story creates spaces of uncertainty and apprehension for the reader. The unstated philosophical message is that all information and knowledge is provisional; and this also implies that all readings are so as well.

While Mengham has drawn attention to how within Green's novels 'a horizontal, linear, reading' will come to be 'discard[ed] as useless,' my argument is that the use of delayed information makes both original and later readings work together because Green rarely provides a definite answer to privilege one reading over another.<sup>66</sup> In 'On Re-reading Novels', Virginia Woolf bemoans that 'we come to novels neither knowing the right way to read them nor very much caring to acquire it.' That essay was partly spurred by Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction*, and

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<sup>65</sup> Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, pp. 284-5.

<sup>66</sup> Mengham, *Idiom of the Time*, p. 205.

Woolf insists that form and ‘the method of storytelling’ create the work of art.<sup>67</sup> Taking this as a point of departure, it is useful to consider how Green’s fiction is formally structured to induce re-reading.

A simple example comes from *Caught*’s closing scene, when Dy sees ‘grey in the red hairs at his [Richard Roe’s] temples’ (180). This physical detail makes possible an interpretation of Roe’s name that goes beyond the standard view that it either expresses anonymity (Richard Roe being, like John Doe, a legal fiction) or that it combines with Pye to create fire (an interpretation, incidentally, that is bolstered by Roe’s red hair). Yet the colour of Roe’s hair suggests roe, the traditionally red ovaries and eggs of fish. Roe’s nickname, ‘Savoury’, can be explained through this interpretation – processed roe is caviar. Wartime rationing gives these connections a charged meaning. Because he is wealthy, Roe’s name implies that even during rationing, the rich possess in the core of their being the means by which to feed themselves on rarities and delicacies, eggs and caviar; indeed, the novel opens with Roe taking his son to a candy shop and concludes with him going down to dinner.<sup>68</sup>

A more involved example comes from *Living*, where elderly Mr Craigan is always ‘reading the works of Dickens, over and over again’ (242). Unlike the other characters who can only dream of escape, Craigan is shown to escape from the dreary reality of his house at the back of the street by immersing himself in Dickens. This cultural activity not only consolidates Craigan’s position as the novel’s exemplar of wisdom but also calls into question the social prejudice against the

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<sup>67</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘On Re-reading Novels’ (1922), in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Andrew McNeillie, 5 vols (San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986-1994), III, 337, 343.

<sup>68</sup> Pye’s name, by contrast, suggests the food of the working class.

intellectual capabilities of the working class. Craigan is the only character positively associated with literature: Mrs Dupret thinks Proust absurd ('he was not a gentleman' [261]); Mr Dupret reads *The Field*, a country life magazine; Dick sees Ruskin as having the final word on things but that 'went nowhere' (211); and none of the other workers is interested in reading. Yet Craigan is revealed, in the course of two stand-alone paragraphs at the novel's end, to be illiterate:

He made movement as if to pick up *Little Dorrit* which lay on the table.

No he knew he could not read. (351)

Up to this point, Craigan's activity of reading *Little Dorrit* has been mentioned so often that its meaning is one of the novel's key interpretive questions. That Craigan's reading is also culturally charged with a political meaning – a working-class man who seems to be continuing the traditions of Victorian self-improvement as opposed to the hustling of the younger workers who frequent pubs, dance floors and the cinema – also contributes to the importance of the question. Craigan's illiteracy does not entirely dismiss the question but rather changes it: why does he persist in pretending to read? In a novel where appearances are maintained, Craigan is no different from the workers saying one thing to the management on the floor and another about them at home, Mrs Dupret sneaking in a prostitute through a back door so the servants won't find out, or Dick picking his nose under the cover of a book. The late admission of his illiteracy also questions the links between reading, re-reading, and Green's own choice to title the novel *Living*. That having the book opened on his lap invariably makes him fall asleep means that Craigan, who so

strongly discourages others from having dreams, willingly brings on his own. His 'reading' of *Little Dorrit* is open and personal; because he is not bound by what Dickens wrote, he can imagine whatever he wishes. This model of open reading strongly mirrors Craigan's storytelling. When talking about Aunt Ellie, he marvels at how three years into married life she decided one day to 'just [go] out through the garden and down the road', and no one ever heard from her afterwards (269). There is no further speculation about her departure or where she could have gone. The mystery remains, and it is the openness of possible interpretations, and the impossibility of fixing down any single one of them, which is essential. Every time Craigan opens *Little Dorrit* the story changes, and every slumber is (a) novel. Re-reading is crucial to the prose work's claim to be a work of art, as that which is read only once remains a good to be consumed, while that which demands to be re-read takes on a life of its own. After his illiteracy is revealed, he is shown to be increasingly irascible, and the last mention of him shows how empty he has become:

Mr Craigan lay in bed in his house. He thought in mind. He thought in mind how he had gone to work when he was eight. He had worked on till no one would give him work. He thought what he had got out of fifty-seven years' work? Nothing. He thought of Lily. He thought what was there now for him? Nothing, nothing. He lay. (380)

His imagination taken away, Craigan is essentially laid to rest.

Another example of delayed information creating a forced re-reading occurs in *Party Going*, the novel that Frank Kermode used to highlight the problems of narrative interpretation. While Kermode rightly identifies the insuperable difficulties in working through the symbolism of the dead pigeons and the mystery man, he

overlooked the formal problems of delayed back story, which in two instances has a critical bearing on the novel. The first concerns the physical distance between the party goers and the mass; the two are always separated from each other by tunnels, windows, or doors.<sup>69</sup> While the party goers are ensconced within the hotel, they can, however, hear the crowd:

Although all those windows had been shut there was a continual dull roar came through them from outside, and this noise sat upon those within like clouds upon a mountain so they were obscured and levelled ...this low roar, which was only conversation in that multitude without, lay over them in such a pall, like night coming on .... (481-2)

This information, given two-thirds of the way through the novel, casts a retrospective restructuring to all that has transpired before by making the mass inseparable from the lives of the partygoers from the very start. Another instance of delayed information in *Party Going* concerns the fact that the party goers are repeating a trip that they took a year before, although what actually happened then is never detailed. This information, mentioned halfway through the novel (439), structures the reading of their current malaise: one year on they are repeating themselves, they have not moved on, they are trying to recapture what once had been magical, etc. These possible interpretations are made possible, and for a close reader impossible to avoid, by Green's narrative choices.

The weak narrative presence in Green's fiction does not imply that he was writing in the absence of, or in defiance of, narrative authority. The situation is more complex and contains a variety of perhaps contradictory positions. He undermines traditional narrative practices but then resorts to them to give his novels a formal

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<sup>69</sup> See Holmesland, *Critical Introduction*, p. 203.

structure. The pursuit of multiple meanings and interpretations through dialogue, while clearing up space in the novel for a non-authoritative presence (the reader), cannot escape the pursuit of authority in different forms. It is impossible, as Booth has reminded us, for the narrator to be entirely eclipsed. Yet in attempting to do so, one might add, the narrative has changed; it is something different, and it does create a different ethics and structure of reading.

### **The Ambiguous Authority of Authorship**

In *Beginnings*, Edward Said makes a compelling case for rooting the fictional process in authority. In its multifarious meanings, authority implies the author's power to initiate, institute, establish (to begin); this occurs against a backdrop of prior works and in opposition to them (to be original); and authority allows the author to maintain continuity in the narrative (to have an identity).<sup>70</sup> Semantically, *auctoritas* is related to *auctor*.<sup>71</sup> Susan Lanser notes that the act of publishing a novel is 'implicitly a quest for discursive authority: a quest to be heard, respected, and believed, a hope of influence.'<sup>72</sup> While this claim is too general to be useful, it points towards the presumptive authority of the work's originator.<sup>73</sup> That authorship sprouts

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<sup>70</sup> Said, *Beginnings*, p. 83.

<sup>71</sup> See E.D. Watt, *Authority* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), p. 11; and Thomas Docherty, *On Modern Authority: The Theory and Condition of Writing, 1500 to the Present Day* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1987).

<sup>72</sup> Susan Sniader Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 6.

<sup>73</sup> See Welch D. Everman, *Who Says This? The Authority of the Author, the Discourse, and the Reader* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), p. xiii ('The author is an authority

authority may be explicitly stated (Fielding asserts his right ‘to digress through this whole history [*Tom Jones*] as often as I see occasion of; of which I am myself a better judge than any pitiful critic whatever’ [Book I, Chapter 2]) or it is presumed through the silent artistry constructing a fictional world (Stephen Dedalus’s ideal narrator ‘refines itself out of existence’).<sup>74</sup>

Green’s views on authorship are enigmatic. Stokes observes that ‘there is seldom a passage in Henry Green’s novels which one can isolate from its context and assert that in it the author is identifiably present’ – yet his novels are undeniably his own and cannot be mistaken for another.<sup>75</sup> Eudora Welty’s view of this paradox is worth considering:

You never see Henry Green, he takes up no space as the author. But though he has never intruded the self, you feel his authorship continuously and pervasively because his novels have a mind—an acute, subtle, impartial mind, a partial disposition, and a temperament that streaks the most marvelous color through the work. He is there at the center of what he writes, but in effect his identity has turned into the fiction.<sup>76</sup>

The desire to write under a pseudonym ‘of peculiar drabness’ (Waugh’s phrase), and to persist in anonymity (James Lees-Milne admits that he did not know that his friend Henry Yorke was an author), is one sign of Green’s ambivalent attitude towards authorship.<sup>77</sup> I do not labour this point because I am more interested in examining his attitudes towards authorship in two particular instances. In *Pack My*

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because of his or her ability to represent the world as it is in words. ... Authority is grounded in artistry, in sensitivity, in genius. In a sense, the writer’s authority is the authority of the parent—the author fathers his text’).

<sup>74</sup> Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 245.

<sup>75</sup> Stokes, *Novels of Henry Green*, p. 25.

<sup>76</sup> Welty, ‘Henry Green: A Novelist of the Imagination’, p. 26.

<sup>77</sup> Evelyn Waugh, ‘A Neglected Masterpiece’, *Graphic*, 14 June 1930, p. 588; James Lees-Milne, ‘Henry Yorke and Henry Green’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 29 (Winter 1983), 387-92 (p. 397).

*Bag*, Green had a formal motivation to foreground a strong authorial presence, but his ‘self-portrait’ is plagued by doubts regarding the value of authorship. The second moment is the introduction of a literary forgery in *Back*, which I will argue undercuts the presumed originality of the work and questions the value of terms like authenticity and originality when applied to the self and the author.

*The Elusive Self-Portrait: Pack my Bag*

Green’s friends were bewildered by *Pack My Bag*. Anthony Powell, a classmate at prep school, Eton and Oxford, called it ‘at once reticent and revealing.’<sup>78</sup> Evelyn Waugh told Green that it ‘was a book no-one else could have written and it makes me feel I know [you] far less well than I did before which, in a way, I take to be its purpose.’<sup>79</sup> The confusion of his friends is matched by that of critics, who have largely passed over the work in silence. Those who have examined it have been confused over its aims and methods; on the level of genre, it has been variously called a notebook’ (Melchiori), ‘novel-like’ (Deeming), and, for one critic, both an ‘autobiographically informed novel’ and ‘an autobiographical essay’ (MacDermott).<sup>80</sup> The detachment of its prose – the pervading ‘sense of the remote’ (161) – and the means by which it deflects scrutiny away from the author are crucial to an understanding of Green’s view of authorship, for if there was a moment when authorship and authority are meant to be synonymous, it is in writing about oneself.

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<sup>78</sup> Anthony Powell, *Infants of the Spring* (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 66.

<sup>79</sup> Evelyn Waugh to Henry Yorke, 13 November 1940, in *Letters EW*, p. 144.

<sup>80</sup> Melchiori, *Tightrope Walkers*, p. 199; Deeming, ‘Henry Green’s War’, p. 883; and MacDermott, *Convergence*, pp. 2, 123.



Authorship's inability to enact authority largely stems from the general failure of writing, which is one of the defining ideas of *Pack My Bag*. Writing is impotent on a number of levels, but the most important one for Green is how a text cannot reanimate the past. If 'being a child is to have things taken from one all the time' (43), the narrative can attempt to repossess the shrapnel maids took away or the battle map a headmaster seized. But Green's work does not make childhood, as Stephen Spender's *World within World* (1951) does, 'like wheels within wheels of this book, which begins and revolves around and ends with it.'<sup>81</sup> Neither is his account like Harold Acton's *Memoirs of an Aesthete* (1948), where the clear-sighted eyes of the memoirist pierce 'through a veil of mist [so that] the images of my childhood quiver and settle into shape.'<sup>82</sup> Green does not write about what he remembers but about what he has forgotten:

Why can I hardly remember her? Only once at all clearly and then she was sick after eating fish ... Later still when she was dead my father told me it was in part my fault for giving her so much to do. I was innocent and cried. I can't have thought of her for twenty years. What was she like and did she ever speak to Poole? (5)

Considering the importance of the nanny to the British upper classes, this failure is significant.<sup>83</sup> What is even more troubling is how, stretching from the end of the First World War to the point when he began writing his memoir, his nanny was forgotten. It is only through writing that her memory is summoned, but writing cannot bring her back to life.

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<sup>81</sup> Stephen Spender, *World within World* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), p. 3.

<sup>82</sup> Harold Acton, *Memoirs of an Aesthete* (London: Methuen, 1948), p. 9.

<sup>83</sup> See Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972).

The book thus begins by undermining the autobiographer's primary fount of authority, personal memory, which is not seized and made vivid but always remains 'some way away from us' (139). As Green puts it, memory consists mainly of 'what one has been told' even when this has 'no bearing on what one has experienced' (7-8), which is echoed later on with regard to personality: 'I wonder how much boys feel because they know they ought to feel?' (146). If identity arises through a confrontation with the mirror, as Lacan and others argue, the first mirror within *Pack My Bag* concerns the headmaster of Green's boarding school: 'In his presence we were small mirrors changing in colour to the hues of his moods' (25). Green reveals here the failure of a presumptive self-identity: the boys, including Henry, are inconstant and varying. Both memory and personality are reflections and distortions of reality, not reality itself. When memory is supplied by others, the self is blamed for forgetting and other people for forcing false memories. The first chapter ends in an admission of failure: 'These things apart I can't think of anything else ... some months in London of which I remember nothing and the others down at home of which I remember, as you have seen, hardly anything at all' (10-11). Instead of linking memories into a coherent *Bildung*, the book instead will take them away, as is evident in its discussion of schools: 'In my case it has been a long and in the end successful struggle to drive out what they taught me there and afterwards ... it is when one has forgotten to be as they taught that the experience begins to be worth while' (18).

The transition into adulthood also involves loss, the guilt coming from what one has become, ‘this kiss which was not exchanged [which] has lasted on where others given or received would have escaped the memory’ (87). Youth lives in the illusion of possibility, while maturity sees only ruin:

These days belonged to adolescence, when one’s heart was the world’s and at times one had then and only then universality of feeling. That is the nostalgia we have for school, or for summer holidays at home, because we felt we shared the world. We were fresh and saw opening out before as a promise what stretches at our feet now forever unredeemed. (85)

Disunity with the world is what it means to become an adult (the book closes with marriage, which involves not universal feelings but exclusivity), which is inevitable when one has developed a personality. And for this consequence Green cannot be consoled, for the guilt that imbues the work is inseparable from what it means to become an adult. That he has become an adult yet has to admit to impotence, just as a child he was powerless to prevent his brother’s death and was unable to comfort the soldiers who would be sent back to France to get killed, only adds to the shame, for what has it all been for?

It is as a result of this shame that the book takes such elliptical and elusive views of its subject. Roy Pascal notes that autobiography becomes an art form through ‘the seriousness of the author, the seriousness of his personality ... the overriding problem is that of truth.’<sup>84</sup> Green, though, afraid of such nakedness – ‘I feel helpless with no clothes’ (39) – delights in the ambiguity of being ‘not so sober as to be afraid to tell the truth but not so drunk as to be incapable of lying’ (181). He relates ‘what one thinks has gone to make one up’ (4). This language recalls

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<sup>84</sup> Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1960), p. 60.

Rousseau's observation, 'I relate simply what I thought I felt.'<sup>85</sup> But Rousseau's autobiography promised to '*tout dire*', say everything, which *Pack My Bag* refuses: 'It is presumptuous to write about oneself,' Green says before chiding the idea that 'everything must go down that one can remember, all one's tool box, one's packet of Wrigley's' until one becomes 'unattractive no doubt, thick with one's spittle' (7-8).

Green wanted *Pack My Bag* to approach 'a movie' but acknowledged that it was instead 'a set of stills' (4). Georges Gusdorf, the first great theorist of autobiography, notes what the distinction between these two might imply: 'While painting is a representation of the present, autobiography claims to retrace a period, a development in time, not by juxtaposing instantaneous images but by composing a kind of film according to a preestablished scenario.'<sup>86</sup> The inability to establish narrative coherence creates a self-portrait which is highly fractured, and Green's still-lives are problematic because he distrusted painting's ability to approach representational truth. Besides 'the idiocy of being photographed' (160), he later came to argue that 'the painter, even if he thinks he is painting from nature, does not paint life-size and in any case he is doing his best on a flat surface.'<sup>87</sup> In *Pack My Bag* painting is cast as a falsification of experience:

Most people remember very little of when they were small and what small part of this time there is that stays is coloured it is only fair to say, coloured and readjusted until the picture which was there, what does come back, has

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<sup>85</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Fragment biographique', in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by Bernard Gagnebin, 5 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1959-1995), I, 1117. Hereafter cited *O.C.*

<sup>86</sup> Georges Gusdorf, 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', trans. by James Olney, in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. by James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 28-48 (p. 35).

<sup>87</sup> Green, 'A Novelist to His Readers: I', in *Surviving*, pp. 136-7.

been over-painted and retouched enough to make it an unreliable account of what used to be. (3-4)

The failure of writing for Green begins with the idea that it can never adequately reflect what happened; he is too conscious of the distance between that experience and the words on the page, which makes *Pack My Bag* not so much a 'self-portrait' but writing about self-portraiture. The awareness of this gap is strengthened by the knowledge that '[w]ords were no means of communication now' (*Caught*, 10). What is even more difficult is that the author has no other means of communicating and that all these words are impotent against the dangers of the day. Public events are 'none of my business' (*PMB*, 190-1) and certainly he did not bring about fascism, Hitler, concentration camps, or bombs from aeroplanes. But the inability of language either to capture past experience truthfully or to effect social change is not, by itself, a reason to condemn writing. It is not that he has chosen the wrong words, that some experience could be better depicted or some social change could come about if only the right words were used. That would make it a technical matter of which words work and which do not. Rather, Green comes to blame authorship for leading one to believe that somehow the right words could be found. More problematic is that the desire to be an author forces one to use dying objects (words and art) as substitutes for life. As E.M. Forster put it in 1947, 'By describing what has happened one gets away from what happened.'<sup>88</sup> If Green only wished to remember past experiences, he would not need to write them down; if he wanted to be politically active, he could join an organization. Authorship, though, condemns an

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<sup>88</sup> Forster, *Commonplace Book*, p. 48.

author to write and nothing else – an awareness that lies, too, behind the distrust of authorship in the works of Samuel Beckett and the younger Thomas Bernhard.

This awareness of authorship's limits becomes, for Green, *Pack My Bag's* defining purpose: 'My task is to show how this came about, how the style, which changed as a girl's complexion changes with the hours she keeps, emerged into 1928, the date beyond which I do not hope to go; how this self-expression grew and how it altered' (162). Rather than a life, it is writing that must be explained – at the time of composing *Pack My Bag*, Green was rereading Doughty, with a particular focus on how '[a] man's style is like the clothes he wears, an expression of his personality.'<sup>89</sup> Just as the choice of clothes did not constitute self-expression but conscious efforts to shock,<sup>90</sup> this style can also be insincere and mannered, as in the following parable of Green's: 'Nothing of what he says is put directly, a great deal of it is fireworks let off to conceal the trend of what in two years' time you may suspect to be towards sentiment, it is all hedged about by the steam power of this trained mind and in a rain of words' (200). The love which began 'through the medium of a long exchange of letters' ends the work: 'for ... ten years now we have now had to write because we are man and wife, there was love' (242). That love sparked through writing is now in the past tense. His hesitancy about writing and authorship is proclaimed in the final paragraphs, when Green writes 'that anything in manuscript is more lively than the selfsame words whatever they may be after having been set in type at the printers' (239). There is a literary conceit in such a view, of trying to stay

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<sup>89</sup> Green, 'Apologia', in *Surviving*, p. 92.

<sup>90</sup> This is restated in the self-portrait he supplied to the *New York Herald Tribune Book Review* in October 1950; see *Surviving*, p. 131 (an 'aesthete' was 'a boy who consciously dressed to shock').

clear of the literary marketplace and thus, in a way, to remain a pure artist.<sup>91</sup> Besides this desire to remain free of the marketplace, the manuscript is prone to emendations and corrections in a way that published work may not be, thus giving off an impression of continued vitality. But the key difference, which Green does not name, resides in the question of authorship: the published work is identified, while the manuscript, despite its more personal touches (distinct handwriting, etc.), is unsigned. Yet Green does finish the book and does publish it: the guilt of contributing to that ‘overblown trumpet,’ literature (234), runs throughout the work.

There is perhaps no more famous literary trumpet than the one beginning Rousseau’s *Confessions*: ‘Let the trumpet of the final judgment sound when it wishes; I will come with this book in my hand to present myself before the sovereign Judge. I will say loudly: this is what I have done, what I have thought, what I was.’<sup>92</sup> His book, a testament to a pure heart and innocent mind, is ‘the only portrait of a man, painted exactly after nature and in all of its truth’ (3). For Rousseau, writing is ‘[t]he only solid consolation’ (247) in a world where ‘there is nothing solid to which the heart can attach itself.’<sup>93</sup> Yet as readers of Rousseau know, writing for him was also a source of anguish, which cut the unity of his life and made him into a different being. Rousseau says of Jean-Jacques in the *Dialogues* that the ‘destiny’ of his life is ‘divided into two parts’ because ‘the time when he published books – marked the

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<sup>91</sup> In *A Personal Record* (1912), for instance, Conrad recounts how the manuscript of *Almayer’s Folly* became for him a sort of ‘talisman or a treasure’ as it ‘acquired a faded look and an ancient, yellowish complexion’; see Conrad, *Personal Record*, pp. 13, 15.

<sup>92</sup> Rousseau, *O.C.*, I, 5. Further references from *Confessions* are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>93</sup> Rousseau, *Rêveries d’un promeneur solitaire*, in *O.C.*, I, 1046.

death of one and the birth of another.<sup>94</sup> By giving birth to another life, writing is a reminder of a life lost.

Writing cannot salvage a man or heal his wounds; it is significant that *Pack My Bag* effectively ends with the juxtaposition between the writing of his first novel and manual labour in Birmingham.<sup>95</sup> Both are products of the hands, but only the latter is in deep contact with reality. If writing is a substitute for life, it is a poor one. It must become its own life, but doing that also creates its own death: ‘Any work of art if it is alive, carries the germs of its death, like any other living thing, around with it.’<sup>96</sup> Feeling the inevitability of his own physical death, the most that he can do is write something that will die also. The greatest guilt in the work is the recognition that it is powerless to recreate life and can instead be only a memorial to the dead. To write truthfully would require the author to distance himself from an authority that he has no right claiming, but this task is impossible, as the source of that falseness lies in the debasement of language and the desire to write.

*Forgery in Back: Who Is the Original, Authentic Author?*

While modernity’s public authority was fractured, modernism’s ‘discourse of originality’ elevated the importance of the author’s ‘personal, private style’.<sup>97</sup> Confronted with a faltering, dysfunctional public authority, modernist writers sought

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<sup>94</sup> Rousseau, *O.C.*, I, 676.

<sup>95</sup> Henry Green to Roy Harrod, September 1928; in Green-Harrod correspondence, British Library, folio 84.

<sup>96</sup> Green, ‘An Unfinished Novel’, in *Surviving*, p. 254.

<sup>97</sup> Rosalind Kraus, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985); Fredric Jameson, ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Society’, in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Hal Foster (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 111-125 (p. 114).



retreat in the private world of the self, as Frank Swinnerton argues in his survey of British literature from 1910-1935: ‘They felt that the world was a revolting place, and a hopeless place. They wanted to ... shatter it to bits and remould it nearer to the heart’s desire.’<sup>98</sup> The individual author had to be stronger than society, and, in the wild dreams of Mallarmé, the author could even replace it. To do this, though, the author needed to be properly himself throughout and had to distance himself from social prejudices and mass thinking. A.S. Ward, looking back to the prior decade in 1930, observed:

The modern poet’s manifesto might run: *I recreate in my poetry the world I perceive; not the world seen by Shakespeare, or Milton, or Keats or any other. I strive in my poetry to communicate my own perceptions; not to make you see what I see, but to recreate for you the experience I have in my unique perception of the universe, and in the unique universe I create about me from the material of my own sensations.*<sup>99</sup>

Even Fernando Pessoa, with his hundreds of heteronyms, worked hard to individualize each of them, turning Ricardo Reiss into a different sort of author than Alberto Caeiro or Álvaro de Campos. Not being original was met with horror; this sentiment is neatly expressed by Dennis in *Crome Yellow* (1921): ‘Oh, these rags and tags of other people’s making! Would he ever be able to call his brain his own? Was there, indeed, anything in it that was truly his own, or was it simply an education?’<sup>100</sup> Anthony Powell called originality ‘one of the manias of contemporary aesthetic doctrine’.<sup>101</sup> While modernist writers valued cooperation and collaboration, Pound’s

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<sup>98</sup> Frank Swinnerton, *The Georgian Literary Scene, 1910-1935: A Literary Panorama* (New York: Farrar, Straus), p. 345.

<sup>99</sup> Ward, *The Nineteen-Twenties*, p. 40 (emphasis original).

<sup>100</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Crome Yellow* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1935 [1921]), p. 139.

<sup>101</sup> Anthony Powell, *A Writer’s Notebook* (London: Heinemann, 2000), p. 69.

demand to ‘make it new’ elevated the primacy of original authorship. Even when stealing from other writers, T.S. Eliot claimed, a great author makes theft something entirely original. The mechanical age, to use Walter Benjamin’s phrase, seemed to place an even greater value upon originality because it was that much rarer – and so modernist authors struggled to individualize their language in opposition to a mass society that devalued it.

The importance of original authorship was, for Evelyn Waugh, the basis of his objections to *Back*, which he conveyed to Green in a letter: ‘To introduce someone else’s [sic] work into your own fiction seems to me reprehensible’. It was, he noted, ‘a matter of literary morals’.<sup>102</sup> Waugh is referring to a passage from the *Souvenirs de la marquise de Créquy* inserted at the work’s mid-point, effectively cutting it in two.

The translated passage is several thousand words long, a significant investment of space in an otherwise short novel. During the Second World War, Green translated two passages from the *Souvenirs*; one appeared in the December 1944 issue of *Horizon* and the other in *Back*. The Créquy passage in *Back* contains a female protagonist whose true love has died but who then falls in love with his double. It is explicitly linked to Charley Summers, not only thematically but even physically – his ‘peg leg’ is the ‘the long souvenir he had brought back from France’ (9).

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<sup>102</sup> Evelyn Waugh to Henry Yorke, 12 November 1946, in *Letters EW*, p. 239.

No scholar has considered the most important quality of this passage – that it comes from a literary forgery.<sup>103</sup> Many commentators have passed over the passage in silence (North, Odom, Weatherhead, Holmesland, Ryf), while the proffered interpretations have been fanciful, to say the least. Bassoff notes that it ‘contests, as well as parallels, the main story’, echoing Melchiori’s claim that the passage ‘introduced in the exact middle of the book symbolically projects’ its meaning into *Back*.<sup>104</sup> Stokes thinks that it ‘has the effect of universalizing the novel’s central situation, of making it seem, not something merely bizarre and unlikely, but an archetype of human experience’, an interpretation contested by Shapiro, who argues that this ‘archetype of human experience’ is subconscious, ‘our erotic connection to our parents.’<sup>105</sup> Russell claims that it serves as ‘the first of many markers that chart his [Charley Summers’] deliverance from his hallucinations about the dead girl.’<sup>106</sup> Kristine Miller argues that it gives Charley Summers ‘an opportunity to identify with an eighteenth-century Frenchwoman in a situation similar to his own and thus to escape the masculine identity of the twentieth-century British soldier within which he is trapped.’<sup>107</sup> Fiona MacPhail speculates that the *Souvenirs* were ‘probably written by the valet de chambre of the Marquise’, a claim not based on any evidence

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<sup>103</sup> An attempt to do this is found in my ‘Fictional Doubles in Henry Green’s *Back*’, *Review of English Studies*, 61.251 (September 2010), 614-26.

<sup>104</sup> Bassoff, *Toward ‘Loving’*, p. 128; Melchiori, *Tightrope Walkers*, p. 203.

<sup>105</sup> Stokes, *Novels of Henry Green*, p. 119; Stephen A. Shapiro, ‘Henry Green’s *Back*: The Presence of the Past’, *Critique*, 7 (1964), 87-96 (p. 94).

<sup>106</sup> Russell, *Nine Novels*, p. 161.

<sup>107</sup> Miller, ‘War of the Roses’, p. 241.

and not pursued further.<sup>108</sup> MacDermott calls the passage ‘semi-fictional’ but does not elaborate.<sup>109</sup> Only Mengham has come close to identifying the passage as a forgery by quoting a June 1834 *Quarterly Review* article which calls the *Souvenirs* a ‘complete forgery’, where the publisher has ‘very ridiculously mistaken *one* lady of the family of Créqui for *another*.’<sup>110</sup> The confusion – are the *Souvenirs* forged or misattributed? – is not cleared up in the few paragraphs devoted to the matter. Going to the *Quarterly Review* source is not more helpful, as the review, later identified as written by John Wilson Croker, vacillates between these two positions.<sup>111</sup> Croker is not well informed about the Marquise de Créquy, saying that she had her title granted to her only in 1771 (which is not true), and he does not link her to most illustrious friend, Rousseau.<sup>112</sup> And it is not comforting to read that Croker groups Créquy’s *Souvenirs* among the ‘disreputable class of fabrications which it has of late been our duty to expose.’<sup>113</sup> All this sounds ideological, not factual, and Mengham does not clear up the matter in his brief discussion.

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<sup>108</sup> Fiona MacPhail, ‘Quotation and Allusion in Henry Green’s *Blindness*’, in *L’Ente et la chimère: aspects de la citation dans la littérature anglaise*, ed. by Lucien Le Bouille (Caen: Centre de Publications de l’Université de Caen, 1986), pp. 131-53 (p. 133).

<sup>109</sup> MacDermott, *Convergence*, p. 204.

<sup>110</sup> Mengham, *Idiom of the Time*, pp. 171-2.

<sup>111</sup> Myron F. Brightfield, ‘Lockhart’s *Quarterly* Contributors’, *PMLA*, 59 (1944), 491-512 (p. 498).

<sup>112</sup> His mistaking the Marquise de Créquy for her aunt, Marie-Louise de Monceau d’Auxy, is even more surprising since Croker edited Walpole’s letters in 1825. Walpole had a familiarity with French salons and refers to a meeting with her in a 1776 letter; the modern edition of Walpole’s correspondence makes the same mistake as Croker, identifying the Marquise de Créquy as Marie-Louise de Monceau d’Auxy. See *Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, ed. Edwine M. Martz, 43 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), vi, 279.

<sup>113</sup> [John Wilson Croker], ‘*Souvenirs de la Marquise de Créqui, 1710 à 1800. Tomes premier et second. Paris. 1834*’, *Quarterly Review*, 51.102 (June 1834), 391-9 (p. 399). In the previous issue, Croker wrote, ‘We shall ... again endeavour, whenever the occasion shall present itself, to save our readers, and the Parisian *tout le monde*, from paying tribute to the audacious cupidity of those “accredited editors who publish *no memoirs but what they themselves manufacture*.”’ See ‘*Souvenirs d’un Sexagénaire*’, *Quarterly Review*, 51.101 (March 1834), 1-18 (p. 2).

In this section I argue that by wilfully using a forgery to change the meaning of *Back*, Green makes authorship indeterminate. If narrative is a process of forging disparate materials, as I argued with regard to *Living* in the previous chapter, the use of a forgery calls into question the source of the author's authority: does it come from the story told or through the author's possession of that story? In *Back*, authorship is made mysterious and potentially duplicitous, its authority to construct and speak truthfully undermined because it does not identify itself openly. Acknowledging the passage's status as a forgery also undermines the dominant interpretation of *Back*, which views the work as concerning Charley Summers's search for authenticity as he attempts to put himself together after the trauma of being a prisoner-of-war, the loss of a lover and a disorienting return to a changed society. The Créquy passage, as a double to Charley's situation, would seem to buttress the importance of this search, for in it a woman who is similarly deluded about a lost love dies of grief. But if the passage is a forgery, then this warning loses its credibility: the defining quality of a forgery is the intention to deceive.<sup>114</sup> The authenticity seen as the driving force of Charley's plight is questioned when he is surrounded by forgeries that are just as real and tangible as any *charaktēr* he may ever possess.<sup>115</sup> Rather than validating Charley's search for a 'true self being', a quest that David Holbrook considers the mark of all great fiction, a forgery passing

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<sup>114</sup> H.M. Paull, *Literary Ethics: A Study in the Growth of the Literary Conscience* (London: T. Butterworth, 1928), p. 39.

<sup>115</sup> Here I refer to the ancient meaning of 'character,' a sign scratched onto a coin to determine its authenticity.

off as an original shows this quest to be futile.<sup>116</sup> If Charley seeks authenticity, he may fall into the trap of becoming a forgery: for what often gives away a forgery is precisely the fact that it is too studied and deliberate to be a creative original.

The *Souvenirs de la marquise de Créquy* was first published between 1834 and 1836 in Paris, two volumes appearing in spring 1834 and the other five volumes in the next two years.<sup>117</sup> From this printing until 1873 there were twelve French editions.<sup>118</sup> An English translation appeared the same year as the original French, innocently titled *Recollections of the Eighteenth Century, from 1710 to 1800*. The long-running popularity of the *Souvenirs* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was due to the ‘animated style in which they are written, a style of ancient times perhaps, but lively, elegant, natural, and especially aristocratic’, a view Sainte-Beuve confirmed when he credited its popularity to ‘plenty of saucy anecdotes about the *ancien régime* and prettily told little stories.’<sup>119</sup> The Yorke family could have known of Créquy’s *Souvenirs* through *The Quarterly Review* or from their Francophile relatives in the Netherlands (Isabelle de Charrière knew many of the people Créquy writes about). The work was also talked up because the *Souvenirs* made the claim, noted in *The Times* and ‘going the round of the papers’ in the summer of 1834, that ‘God Save the King’ was French in origin, a claim later repeated in the late 1930s in the

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<sup>116</sup> David Holbrook, *The Novel and Authenticity* (London: Vision Press, 1987), p. 18.

<sup>117</sup> Marquise de Créquy [falsely attributed], *Souvenirs de la Marquise de Créquy. 1710-1800*, 7 vols (Paris: Librairie de Fournier Jeune, 1834-6).

<sup>118</sup> On the publication history of the *Souvenirs*, see Will L. McLendon, *Le Comte de Courchamps: une ténébreuse carrière sous l’Empire et la Restauration* (Paris: Minard, 1980), p. 9.

<sup>119</sup> Marquise de Créquy, *Recollections of the Eighteenth Century, from 1710 to 1800*, trans. from the French, 2 vols (London: Longman, 1834), I, 7; C.-A. Sainte-Beuve, ‘Introduction’, in Marquise de Créquy, *Lettres inédites de la Marquise de Cresqui à Senac de Meilhan*, ed. by Édouard Fournier (Paris: Potier, 1856), p. vii.

correspondence pages of *The Times*.<sup>120</sup> The seven-volume first edition, acquired second hand, is in the Yorke family library at Forthampton Court.<sup>121</sup> While Green used this for his translations, in his lifetime there appeared an abridged 1926 French edition and a 1927 biography of the Marquise de Créquy, which notes of the *Souvenirs* that ‘this tissue of lies, gossip, and unbelievable anachronisms’ has for long been ‘definitively condemned’ as a forgery.<sup>122</sup>

The *Souvenirs* was denounced as such upon its publication.<sup>123</sup> That did not stop it from selling well: the introduction to the 1855 Garnier Frères edition calls the work ‘a truly *European* success’, so much so that ‘never had [book] pirates attempted a more profitable speculation.’<sup>124</sup> It was compiled from a variety of sources, including Potocki’s *Manuscript trouvé à Saragosse*, and penned by its publisher, whose own name is uncertain, according to his biographer, alternating between ‘Pierre-Marie-Jean Cousen, or Maurice or Marius Cousen, or Cousen-

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<sup>120</sup> See *The Times*, 29 August 1834, p. 3. See also *The Times*, 27 July 1938, p. 3; and Percy A. Scholes, “‘God Save the King’: The Growth of the National Anthem”, *The Times*, 13 August 1938, p. 11. The original claim is contained in *Souvenirs de la Marquise de Créquy*, I, 148-50.

<sup>121</sup> This is confirmed by the current proprietor of Forthampton Court, Henry Green’s nephew, John Yorke. Each volume contains the book plate of the Earl of Granville, and there is also a bookseller’s stamp (WHITE 24 PALL MALL). Correspondence with the author, 15 February 2008.

<sup>122</sup> Marquise de Créquy, *Souvenirs de la Marquise de Créquy* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1926); Paul Tisseau, *La Marquise de Créqui: sa vie, son salon, son temps, ses amis, sa correspondance avec J.J. Rousseau et Sénac de Meilhan* (Paris: Éditions Émile-Paul Frères, 1927), p. ix. In 1904 in England there was an abridged form of the *Souvenirs*, published under the title *The French Noblesse of the XVIII Century*, trans. by Colquhoun Grant (London: Murray, 1904). The most comprehensive survey of literary forgeries in England at the time marked out the *Souvenirs* as a work full of ‘charm’ but a forgery nonetheless. See J.A. Farrer, *Literary Forgeries* (London: Longmans, Green, 1907), p. 278.

<sup>123</sup> See J.M. Quérard, *Les Supercheries littéraires dévoilées: galerie des écrivains français de toute l’Europe qui se sont déguisés sous des anagrammes, des astéronymes, des cryptonyms, des initialismes, des noms littéraires, des pseudonymes facétieux ou bizarre, etc.*, 3 vols (Paris: G.P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1964 [1869-70]), I, 806-7 (entry CRÉQUI), which contains a brief bibliography of contemporaneous denunciations of the forgery. Quérard approvingly quotes Léon Duval, who concludes that in the *Souvenirs* ‘there is not a word which is the Marquise de Créquy’s’ (806).

<sup>124</sup> Comte de Courchamps, *Souvenirs de la Marquise de Créquy, de 1710 à 1803*, rev edn, 10 vols (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1885), I, vii (emphasis original).

Courchamps, or even still Comte de Courchamps.’ Not much is known about his youth, but at an early age he had a ‘pronounced effeminacy, transvestism, and taste for gossip.’<sup>125</sup> A staunch royalist and Roman Catholic, Courchamps was involved in a number of political scandals. He also had a history of forgery: in 1841 *La Presse*, which printed a series of articles that he edited (the *Mémoires inédits de Cagliostro*), sought damages after they were exposed as a fraud.<sup>126</sup>

The Créquy forgery is not convincing. It opens with the Marquise making a ‘ridiculous declaration’, an admission of ignorance of the date of her birth: she estimates 1699, whereas the actual date was 1714, a difference that seems like too much of a stretch.<sup>127</sup> Instead of being married for thirty years, as the memoirs had it, she was married for only three. The newspapers saw two possibilities: either the Marquise had an unusual relationship to time, mistaking the date of her birth and the length of her marriage by unusually large measures, as well as using certain concepts and language that had not appeared until after her death, or the work was a forgery. Sainte-Beuve devotes nearly one hundred pages to this controversy in his introduction to *Lettres inédites de la Marquise de Cresqui à Senac de Meilhan* (1856) and also made his arguments accessible to a wider audience by publishing

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<sup>125</sup> McLendon, *Comte de Courchamps*, pp. 13, 16.

<sup>126</sup> See Quérard, *Supercheries littéraires dévoilées*, I, 616-31 (entry CAGLIOSTRO). Quérard very helpfully provides the main charges brought forth by *La Presse* against Courchamps, and the forgery of the Marquise de Créquy’s *Souvenirs* were part of the case as evidence of his practice and pattern of deception. See also the entry ‘COURCHAMPS’ (I, 796), where Quérard exposes as a forgery *Les Nuits de Berlin*, also edited by Courchamps. This 1841 case remained in the public memory, as over fifteen years later Lalanne could write that: ‘everyone remembers that in 1841 *Le National* taught the public that a feuilleton inserted into *La Presse* was nothing but an exact reproduction of a novel published twenty years earlier. This resulted in a civil process brought forth by *La Presse* against its collaborator.’ See Ludovic Lalanne, *Curiosités littéraires* (Paris: Adolphe Delahays, 1857), p. 134.

<sup>127</sup> *Souvenirs de la Marquise de Créquy. 1710-1800*, I, 10.



them in three consecutive columns in the *Constitutionnel* (later *Causeries du Lundi*: 22 and 29 September, 6 October 1856).

By the time Green translated Créquy's *Souvenirs*, there could have been no doubt that he was working with a forgery. It seems improbable that he would have used the source as the novel's critical skeleton without knowing anything about it. That he published a translation from Créquy's *Souvenirs* in *Horizon* in December 1944, though, makes it even more likely that Green knew that he was working with a forgery when using it in *Back*. It would be very much like Green to offer up a forged passage for *Horizon*, whose editor, Cyril Connolly, was an acquaintance from their time together at Eton but hardly a friend. Even if Green didn't know it, though, it seems probable that certain *Horizon* contributors well versed in eighteenth-century French literature and close to Green, like C.M. Bowra, the Oxford don, or the poet and critic Peter Quennell, whom Green knew from Oxford, could have informed him. More generally, the majority of criticism appearing in *Horizon* concerned France; at the start of 1944, Connolly observed that because of wartime sympathy 'so many critics are fascinated with French literature.'<sup>128</sup> Among its readers and contributors, the translation of a notorious forgery would have elicited comment.

In the novel itself, though, there is no precise way of establishing that the source is a forgery. Charley Summers calls it a 'ridiculous story' – ridiculous as in absurd (and thus false) or deserving derision (104). His comment echoes the

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<sup>128</sup> Cyril Connolly, 'Comment', *Horizon*, 9.49 (January 1944), 5-6 (p. 5). Most obvious is the two-part article by Enid Starkie, 'Eccentrics of Eighteen-Thirty,' which dealt entirely with France, and uses a number of memoirs in its narrative (May and June 1944). *Horizon* was also the British distributor for *La Fontaine*, a French-language literary monthly; see Michael Shelden, *Friends of Promise: Cyril Connolly and the World of Horizon* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), pp. 107-9.

‘ridiculous declaration’ in the first line of the *Souvenirs*. One speculative link, not beyond Green and certainly in his spirit, is that the head of Charley’s office is a man named Corker, who of all the characters in the novel is the most opinionated, hysterical, as well as obtuse: ‘It’s sex is the whole trouble. There you are. Sex’ (188). This could very well be a joke about John Wilson Croker, who denounced the original work as a forgery and was known to be a man of violent temper and direct speech; Croker’s biography was published by Allen and Unwin in 1940, and he was the subject of four *TLS* articles in the early 1940s.<sup>129</sup>

Yet the context surrounding the Créquy passage in *Back* is indeterminate, its source left deliberately vague. It is sent to Charley by James Phillips, but whether or not it comes from a literary review which Rose subscribes to, as originally mentioned (91), or one which James Phillips’s sister subscribes to (129), is unresolved. This double source of the memoir plays into the novel’s intense doubling of events and characters, and the Freudian undertone of mistaking wife with sister is not incidental, as the ambiguous sexual dynamics of mothers and daughters are a constant source of humour and despair in *Back*. The murky source of the story is also linked to the questions of identity and paternity plaguing the novel, as Charley’s paternity of Ridley, Rose’s son, is never established. When Charley talks about the

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<sup>129</sup> Myron F. Brightfield, *John Wilson Croker* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1940). The *TLS* had a number of articles on Croker in the 1940s: see Allan Lang Strout, ‘Lockhart and Croker’, 30 August 1941, p. 424; article continued on 13 September 1941, p. 464; and Allan Lang Strout, ‘Lockhart as Gossip: New Letters to J.W. Croker’, 17 October 1942, p. 516; continued on 31 October 1942, p. 540. Croker would have been known to Green through his 1831 edition of Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*. From his early reading of Carlyle, which is prominent in *Blindness*, Green may have read Macaulay’s essay referring to this edition, which notes that ‘Boswell’s Book had a noiseless birth, compared with this Edition of Boswell’s Book’. See Thomas Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, 5 vols (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1900-1901), III, 62-3.

Créquy passage with James Phillips, they quickly come to the conclusion that all modern writers are liars. The ‘tripe’ that ‘screwy authors serve us up with’, Phillips says, only prejudices our beliefs about marriage (129) – the only other author alluded to in *Back* is Rhoda Broughton, a popular romance writer.<sup>130</sup>

James Phillips is convinced that the thematic similarities between the Créquy and Charley’s story are uncanny; when he sends Charley the review, he points out its almost holy nature by marking the story ‘with a cross’ and affixing a note, from the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent, ‘Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest’ (91). Phillips’s belief that the text is sacred – or that it can lead to illumination, as happened to Augustine when hearing a child singing the refrain *tolle, lege* [take (it) up and read] – is undermined, though, by the text which follows. The passage Green translates is excerpted from Chapters VI and VII of volume two of the 1834 edition, over eighty pages of text. While quite elegant, Green’s translation constructs a consistent and linear narrative by being selective; he removes some of the original’s charm, which comes from its meandering and happenstance digressions. He also modifies the story to make it a ‘double’ of what is occurring in *Back*: the ‘quelques

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<sup>130</sup> In *Back* Charley passes a second-hand bookshop and in the window display sees a set of her works. Charley doesn’t see one of Broughton’s more popular works, *Red as a rose was she*, but instead seizes on *Cometh up as a flower* (56). In this fictionalised autobiography (1867), Nell Le Strange is in love with a young and charming army officer, Dick McGregor, but is forced to marry a richer, older suitor. The same marriage choice is forced upon the protagonist in the Créquy passage. *Cometh up as a flower* also shares a similar opening to *Back*: it begins in a churchyard, with the protagonist musing about her own death and her relationship to those closest to her. She does not wish to be buried in the family mausoleum but instead under an ash tree, and if Dolly survives her, she imagines her planting ‘a rose at my head’. See *Cometh Up as a Flower* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1867), p. 7.

années' of the original becomes 'a few months' (104), making it correspond exactly to the novel.<sup>131</sup>

As befits the intertextual moment, we have a story within a story: a grandmother tells her grandson a story about her mother. Even though the story is false – the real Comtesse d'Egmont, a close friend of Madame de Créquy, was born in 1740, about twenty-five years after Madame de Créquy – it is a charming tale, and like so many stories, its charm comes because it treats families, marriage, and love. The unhappy protagonist is Sophie Septimanie de Richelieu. Just as Madame de Créquy had in her youth fallen in love with a young officer only to have her family marry her off to a rich man many years her senior (fifty!), young Sophie falls in love with the Count de Gisors, a young army officer, but her father insists that she marry Count Egmont, a man not lacking in qualities but devoid of passion, whose family was 'one of the best connected in Europe' (93). The marriage is not wholly unsatisfactory: Madame Egmont 'got on quite well with her husband' (93).<sup>132</sup> Her youthful lover also married but died a few months later. Madame d'Egmont always remained steadfast in her affections towards the Count de Gisors, and 'she fainted if his name came up in conversation' (94). But it seems as if the story will end here, simply another tale of a young aristocratic girl who served the interests of her family by marrying a man she did not love, until she is told by a mysterious, reclusive aristocrat, the Vidame de Poitiers, that the Count de Gisors 'left behind him a young

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<sup>131</sup> *Souvenirs de la Marquise de Créquy, 1710-1800*, II, 222.

<sup>132</sup> The biographer of the Comtesse d'Egmont notes that 'Mme d'Egmont had for her husband esteem and respect above all; love never played a part.' In La Comtesse d'Armaillé, *La Comtesse d'Egmont, fille du Maréchal de Richelieu, 1740-1773, d'après ses lettres inédites à Gustave III* (Paris: Didier, 1890), p. 35.

fellow, of about his own age, who is his double' (97). This double, a common soldier in the guards, is the Count de Gisors' half-brother, clearly tying Septimanie's plight to Charley's (Nancy is Rose's half-sister and also a 'common' woman). The story proceeds with Madame d'Egmont having visions of this double, first at the funeral of Vidame de Poitiers and then at a state dinner at Versailles. The double's father plots to eliminate his bastard son, and one day he mysteriously disappears; Septimanie dies of grief. The narrator ends the story: 'All my life I shall never forget this twin attachment, these two extraordinary passions she somehow found a way to lavish on two men ... Nor can I ever forget her last moments when, with both lovers gone, she seemed, as she in her turn lay dying before my eyes, to fuse the memory of these two men into one, into one true lover' (104).<sup>133</sup>

The similarity between this story and Charley's fate is not lost upon the reader, although Charley himself doesn't see it: 'I don't see much in books' (129), he says later to James Phillips when talking about the story. His inability to identify with Septimanie is probably due to the difference in backgrounds and breeding; whereas she is 'indefinably gracious' and 'always absolutely herself', Charley is fumbling and divided, physically as well as mentally. But the bare outlines of the story, a person's attachment to a dead lover and the half-sibling double, make Septimanie's and Charley's situations undeniably close. Yet what can the story mean

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<sup>133</sup> Green takes quite a liberty in translating here. The last line in the French original reads, 'Je n'oublierai jamais ses derniers momens, où le souvenir de ces deux aimables frères était confondu dans un même sentiment de fidélité si naïve et si tendre!' (*Souvenirs de la Marquise de Créquy, 1710-1800*, II, 222). Green's French was quite good; Nancy Mitford, whom Green visited in Paris in 1952, stated that he spoke 'excellent French'; see Nancy Mitford to Evelyn Waugh, 18 May 1952, in *Letters of Nancy Mitford and Evelyn Waugh*, p. 229.

to Charley? The doubling of his situation with that of someone far removed from him in time, place, and gender is intriguing but not terribly enlightening. The passage Green translates does not contain much of a moral, other than that perhaps dying of grief for a double who may or may not be real is an extraordinary and memorable thing. The ending of the story in Green's translation is rather flat and begs the question of why this story is so important to tell to one's grandson. The 1834 English translation of Créquy's memoirs goes beyond what Green translated to end the story: 'My God what presentiments I have seen realised! If you have fixed presentiments do not despise and neglect them, my child: It would be a dangerous and perhaps culpable folly; for in short what do we know, and can we tell who ought not to yield to experience?'<sup>134</sup> This is in reference to Septimanie's original resistance to visiting the Vidame de Poitiers, her feeling that something 'evil' will come out of their meeting (96).

This turn back to instinct and the need to rely upon one's own sense of selfhood, had it been provided, would have made Charley see the story's resonance to his condition. Always feeling himself 'too slow', not only because he is lame but also in conversation and towards women, Charley does not have the confidence to trust in instinct. The greatest instinct, of course, is survival, regarding which Charley is also deficient (his carelessness and inattention at the front cost him his leg). The intrinsic connotation of instinct with animality is also lost upon Charley, who with his prosthetic leg has been removed from the animal kingdom and made into a machine man. The integrity of the self which goes into instinct – the entire self

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<sup>134</sup> *Recollections of the Eighteenth Century, from 1710 to 1800*, II, 315.

becoming directed towards one object, be it fight or flight, without distinction between mind and body – is also physically impossible for him.

Madame d'Egmont's death over a lost love is a grim presentiment of Charley's possible future. But the Créquy passage in *Back* ends with the narrator musing about a final image, Septimanie on her deathbed consumed by grief but having 'fuse[d] the memory of these two men into one, into one true lover.' The sculptural mechanism of fusion, its metallic connotations of fire smelting union, also marks the ending of *Back*, whose final image is one of presence, an embodiment of being: 'with her walking by his side, she grew upon him, became an embodiment of everything comforting, and true, and good' (203). After so much that is delusional and imaginary, the novel concludes with a fixed image of being, which in turn will give way to a future of uncertainty but which, at its moment of becoming, seems eternal. This is Charley crying as he repeats aloud 'Rose':

'There,' Nancy said, 'there,' pressed his head with her hands. His tears wetted her. The salt water ran down between her legs. And she knew what she had taken on. It was no more or less, really, than she had expected. (208)

The verbs in the simple past fix them in place while Nancy's 'there' is an echo around their embrace, which harkens back to the religious injunctions which foreword the Créquy passage, the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent, which says that through belief 'we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life' – only for Charley and Nancy, this embrace will be in life, not beyond it. Like Constantin Brancuși's *Kiss*, Charley and Nancy have become

monuments to a union not through fire but the gentle, soft, and endless waters of tears, which do not break them apart but seal them together.

The manner in which the novel's interpretation is changed because of the authorship of the Créquy passage shows Green stretching the norms and expectations of authorship. There is no single model of authorship that holds sway, and the view of authorship as a private possession, with an ingrained authority, is contested. Because of its status as a forgery, the passage's authority becomes diluted, yet this reading is based on accepting a strong version of authorship as the originator of meaning. What Green indisputably does, though, is showcase how the authority of authorship cannot be given but is subject to evasion and duplicity. By not acknowledging the source as a forgery, and not providing the reader with the clues to identify it as such, Green is certainly playing a tricky game with the reader, as the author of *Back* comes to mirror in some ways the forger of the Créquy memoir, for he too is attempting to pass off as an original a fake. This occurred at a time when forgery had a heightened significance: the forging of ration coupons was a common occurrence during wartime and the new five pound note was introduced in late 1945 to abate forgery, while that year Han van Meegeren scandalised the art world and made newspaper headlines as he confessed to forging six Vermeers, among them *Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus*, the most visited painting in Holland.<sup>135</sup> In this cultural context of forgery, *Back* questions the status of authorship and its relationship to the production of meaning.

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<sup>135</sup> Forgery was more common in Germany, but concerns that the notes were circulating back forced the Bank of England to introduce a new note. See *The Times*, 18 October 1945, p. 9.



### The Authority of Education

Michael Bell has convincingly argued that the novel, education, and authority are inseparable. While Bell's study is about education in the broadest sense – development, maturation, and *Bildung* – it also points to the 'structural conditions' under which education takes place.<sup>136</sup> My focus here will be the physical environment where learning occurs, the school itself. Besides schools, Green's long-running interest in institutions has been remarked upon: there are factories in *Living*, the Auxiliary Fire Service in *Caught*, domestic service in *Loving*, and the modern workplace in *Back* (and marginally so in *Nothing* and *Doting*). Setting his characters within institutions was a way for Green to situate personality within a specific context with its own rules and history. During his lifetime, Green would have been aware of the rising power of both economic and political institutions. From a childhood relatively free of external powers or State authority, the increasing regimentation of life within organizations and institutions was one of the most profound social changes he encountered.<sup>137</sup> The age of what Harold Acton called 'passportless security' was gone.<sup>138</sup> And the most important institution Green confronted, like a number of other writers his age, was the public school. In this

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<sup>136</sup> Michael Bell, *Open Secrets: Literature, Education, and Authority from J-J. Rousseau to J.M. Coetzee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 4.

<sup>137</sup> On the passing of this life relatively free of both State power and technical organizations, see J.M. Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London: Macmillan, 1919), Chapter 2; and Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, trans. by Cedar and Eden Paul (London: Cassell, 1943).

<sup>138</sup> Acton, *Memoirs of an Aesthete*, p. 9.

section, I argue that Green attempted to undermine the authority that the public school sought to instil in its pupils not by criticizing its effects (though he does do that) but by showing it to be empty.

That the public school was a ‘total institution’ was not disputed by either its critics or supporters. Christopher Hussey, whose hagiographic *Eton College* was published by *Country Life* in 1926, several years after Green left the school, compares the social system of the public school to the title-page of Hobbes’s *Leviathan*.<sup>139</sup> Entering boys at Eton had to pass the ‘colour test’, which consisted of learning the names and status of all of the house members, being able to repeat them forwards or backwards in order of seniority and through their initials, as well as the more obvious imposition of knowing school traditions and songs.<sup>140</sup> In this totalizing society, dress was regulated to an extreme that Christopher Hollis found bewildering: ‘who wore stick-up and who wore turn-down collars, what Collegers wore top-hats and what Collegers went about bare-headed, who turned his coat-collar up and who turned it down, the sartorial customs of the school were of a complication that went beyond sanity.’<sup>141</sup> The first few weeks of school, Evelyn Waugh noted of his time at Lancing, a minor public school that took such matters even more seriously than its more established competitors, were spent in becoming ‘an initiated member of the tribe’, learning the ‘code’ of rules and behaviour.<sup>142</sup> John Betjeman described the

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<sup>139</sup> Christopher Hussey, *Eton College*, 2nd edn (London: Country Life, 1926), p. 36.

<sup>140</sup> John Wakeford, *The Cloistered Élite: A Sociological Analysis of the English Public Boarding School* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 56.

<sup>141</sup> Christopher Hollis, ‘The Bright End of the Stick’, in *John Bull’s Schooldays*, ed. by Brian Inglis (London: Hutchinson, 1961), p. 85.

<sup>142</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *A Little Learning* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983 [1964]), pp. 102-3.

perfect schoolboy as ‘[u]pright and honourable, good at games | Well-built, blue-eyes; a sense of leadership’, whereas he, the expectant young poet, committed the crime of having ‘far too many books’.<sup>143</sup>

That Eton also affected to impose its authority upon the child beyond superficial respect for dress and games is well-noted in the historical literature on the public school. The opening of the Memorial Building for the Boer War, in which 129 Old Etonians died, took place in 1908, with the King telling the listening youth:

Whatever may be your subsequent careers, you all have the opportunity of leaving Eton trained in the knowledge and accomplishments of English gentlemen, and disciplined to the self-restraint, the consideration for others, and the loyal acceptance of private and public duties which are the ideals of our race.<sup>144</sup>

Games moulded the bodies of maturing boys; the school would also reshape them psychologically to be standard-bearers of Englishness. Anthony Farrant, the ex-public schoolboy protagonist of Graham Greene’s *England Made Me* (1935), has a face ‘no more mature than when he was a schoolboy’, while for Minty, the old Harrovian, ‘school phrases stung his lips, but they were always first to his tongue’ – at some point, though, ‘a man should grow up’.<sup>145</sup> Aldous Huxley, a former master at Eton, noted that within the public schools one found the ‘sacrifice of the individual to the system, psychologically unsound methods of teaching, and irrational methods of imposing discipline.’<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> John Betjeman, *Summoned by Bells* (London: John Murray, 1962), pp. 43, 68.

<sup>144</sup> ‘Opening of the New Memorial Buildings, Eton College’, *Musical Times*, 1 December 1908, 780-2 (p. 781).

<sup>145</sup> Graham Greene, *England Made Me* (London: Vintage, 2001 [1935]), pp. 11.

<sup>146</sup> Aldous Huxley, ‘Education’, in *Proper Studies* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1928), p. 150.

Green's fiction is drawn to the classroom as a locus of false authority: 'school life ... [is] a larger picture, an enlargement of the relationships which obtain between people in the world' (*PMB*, 13). While this is most strongly felt in *Concluding*, the claims and authority of education are overriding concerns in *Blindness* and *Pack My Bag*, and his other novels touch upon the theme through their undeniably public school characters. The move from nursery to boarding-school, he notes in *Pack My Bag*, is 'the biggest change one could have', for there is 'nothing so alien as to join a society of seventy-five others before one is old enough to know one's mind, or rather before one has any mind at all' (17-8). His first schoolmaster, a 'remarkable old man of a violent appearance ... had more authority than anyone I have met' (12-3). In terms that prefigure the relationship between Mary and the school directors in *Concluding*, Green notes that '[w]e all ran to get favours from him, we would run all day. He was so all-powerful it was a form of self-protection. In his presence we were small mirrors changing in colour to the hues of his moods' (25). Green's term for the master is the double-edged 'our old tyrant' (42), a phrase that dutifully expresses his personal authority over the lives of the schoolboys, who themselves 'moved all together under one authority in the most primitive form of society known to man' (91).

The competing demands of home and school are a central category of opposition in *Concluding*, which is set on a property once held privately but now taken over by the State to create a civil servant training school for girls. The novel's spatial ambit is limited to the school, 'this Great Place' (62), and two cottages (for

Rock and Adams), as well as vague mentions of Bradhampton (100) and London. There is little description of these spaces; the novel begins with Rock rising out of bed with a ‘groan’ (5) and looking out into the fog, and while many of the characters speak of the day ahead as a fine one, there is no mention of the weather to confirm or deny these hopes. The lack of visual description oddly parallels the main plot, the physical disappearance of two students. The sun does not aid in the search for the missing girls but is so intense that it blinds characters (114), while the moon ‘stunned the eye by stone, was all-powerful, and made each of these three related people into someone alien, glistening, frozen eyed, alone’ (153). Within the school building, one goes ‘[d]own a dark Passage’ (114, 145), but, enigmatically, ‘[l]ight was dark in the passage’ (189). The novel’s visual poverty is, I suggest, due to the school setting. Green’s portrayal of an overbearing school and institution is buttressed by the extensive reach of the school through the novel.

The school in *Concluding* has a vague but overpowering educational purpose. Its education of ‘embryo State Servants’ (22) is never directly portrayed. There is talk of the girls being ‘provided with pig farms’, management of which would allow them ‘to learn from practical experience the day to day problems which arise in Administration’ (101), but the absurdity of this endeavour, especially at a time of ‘this filthy swine fever’ (149), is only too evident. Mr Rock offers to provide ‘a brief weekly homily on the care of pigs’, as he has experience of this with Daisy, his own pig, but this offer is rebuffed (156). The school directors, Miss Baker, who ‘had long been an acknowledged authority in State circles on the parentless’ (58), and Miss

Edge, are serious, but their lack of competence and ability is evident through the comic portrayal of their minor obsessions and the desertion of the school by Mary, '[o]f all our children ... the truthfullest' (117). In many ways, the school resembles the Benjamenta Institute in Robert Walser's *Jakob von Gunten* (1908):

One learns very little here, there is a shortage of teachers, and none of us boys of the Benjamenta Institute will come to anything, that is to say, we shall all be something very small and subordinate later in life. The instruction that we enjoy consists mainly in impressing patience and obedience upon ourselves, two qualities that promise little success, or none at all.<sup>147</sup>

While Walser's Benjamenta Institute is located in the city, the Institute in *Concluding* is isolated in the countryside, far away from the interference of others. This makes it a miniature republic, '[a] complete community related in itself' (95) with two directors claiming sovereignty over the space. Miss Edge's name indicates this territorial usurpation, as she is the one who most vigorously plots to eliminate Mr Rock from his free-standing cottage so that she could install herself there. She dislikes him because 'he flaunts our authority' (175).<sup>148</sup>

Miss Edge justifies her actions through a Leviathan-like sovereignty:

You and I are here to protect our girls, Hermione ... We stand on guard over the Essential Goodness of this great Place. And when we sense a threat, our duty is to exercise the initiative the State expects to avert a danger. (134)

This speech introduces one of the most compelling justifications for sovereign authority, the right to proclaim a 'state of exception' or emergency. A theory with

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<sup>147</sup> Robert Walser, *Jakob von Gunten*, trans. by Christopher Middleton (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969 [1908]), p. 23. The original title was *Ein Tagebuch*; it was written in a diary form. As the narrator notes: 'There is only a single class, and that is always repeated: "How Should a Boy Behave?" Basically, all our instructed is centered on this question. We are not taught anything' (24).

<sup>148</sup> She presumably means that Rock 'flouts' their authority. This may be a typesetter's mistake but it may also be intentional on Green's part, with Miss Edge's mistaken use of language revealing her lack of authority.

roots in Hobbes and Locke, Carl Schmitt took it to elaborate heights in the 1920s, while during the Second World War, the Parliament passed an act requiring all persons ‘to place themselves, their services, and their property at the disposal of His Majesty’ in order to confront the existential threat the nation faced.<sup>149</sup> Around the time Green was writing *Concluding*, post-war planners wanted to ‘take the country half way to Moscow’.<sup>150</sup> Works like James Burnham’s *The Managerial Revolution* (1941) were harbingers of a standardized future; in J.B. Priestley’s novel on a wartime weapons factory, *Daylight on Saturday* (1944), there is an homage to technocratic management: ‘Only machines and highly organised production can save us from the Nazis, and only machines and highly organised production can save us from a national decline and compulsory mass emigration after the war.’<sup>151</sup> Connolly denounced the effect that these beliefs and growing institutional power had on art:

The State now sits by the bedside of literature like a policeman watching for a would-be suicide to recover consciousness, who will do anything for the patient except allow him the leisure, privacy and freedom from which art is produced. ... since all governments are equally philistine (for all politicians worship power, and power excludes art) our rôle is much more likely to be in opposition to whatever government is in power in the interests of literature and art.<sup>152</sup>

The character in *Concluding* who personalizes sovereignty is Miss Baker: ‘Perhaps I should remind you that the State, when It delegated Responsibility to my

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<sup>149</sup> Mollie Panter-Downes, ‘Letter from London’ (24 May 1940), in *The New Yorker Book of War Pieces* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947), p. 30. See also E.S. Turner, *The Phoney War on the Home Front* (London: Michael Joseph, 1961), pp. 37-8. In *Caught*, Pye mentions the 1939 Defence Acts, which, in his words, gave firemen ‘the right of entry into any place, anywhere, at any time’ (73).

<sup>150</sup> Sir William Beveridge, qtd. in Angus Calder, *The People’s War: Britain 1939–1945* (New York: Pantheon, 1969), p. 527.

<sup>151</sup> J.B. Priestley, *Daylight on Saturday: A Novel about an Aircraft Factory* (London: Reprint Society, 1944), pp. 57-8.

<sup>152</sup> Cyril Connolly, ‘Comment’, *Horizon*, 10 (December 1944), 367-9.

colleague and myself, gave us a large measure of protection, or latitude if you prefer the word' (108). What the novel portrays through the disappearance plot is how the sovereign powers cannot enact extraordinary measures; stuck in their routines, afraid of failure, Miss Edge and Miss Baker refuse to alert the police to the girls' being lost and hope, against reason, that somehow the event will blow over and not disturb the Founder's Day dance scheduled for that evening.

The school educates not through actual instruction but through domination of the girls' appearance, appetites, and behaviour. Yet they are rebellious in a manner that their otherwise uniform presentation does not hint at. The students know, as Moira states, that the directors, '[t]hose two old pussies ... [will] never learn what really happens here' (71). Their ludicrous behaviour – Miss Edge has a well-known 'terror of rabbits dead' (114), which makes her faint when catching sight of a rag doll, and smoking three cigarettes makes her feel so drunk that she proposes marriage to her arch-enemy, Mr Rock (195) – undercuts the legitimacy of their control even if it does not undermine the actual power that they hold. The 'Institute' exists to 'turn all those who come under its influence upwards and onwards to the ideals, to the practical politics, that is, the High Purposes of the State' (83). The abstraction of these claims, and the emptiness underneath them, are mocked by the hollow capitals.

This inability to create a distinct authority in the school is mirrored in the hierarchy the novel constructs between the Institute and the State, for the mini-republic of the Institute is dependent upon the continued grace of the State, as Miss



Edge understands: ‘The way to handle all matters of this sort is to act in the name of the State at once, then congratulate the State on what has been done afterwards’ (178). While the directors proclaim for themselves an authority *in loco parentis* (‘We stand in the shoes of our students’ parents, it is a very real trust which the State has put upon us here ...’ [76]), their dereliction of duty is only too evident. Miss Edge notes her anger at Mary’s continued disappearance; she is ‘a single student who, in a moment of jealousy perhaps, had hidden herself from some adolescent qualm, thus laying their Institute open to the Grand Inquisition of a State Enquiry, and the horror of Reports’ (90). Their fear is partly driven by the fact that the Institute is ‘[s]taffed ... by men and women who are only too well aware they can be replaced almost at a stroke of the pen by the State, from which there is virtually no appeal’ (95). The only official State letter within the novel is signed by Secretary of State Swaythling, a name suggesting a lack of constancy. The State, the unseen but all-powerful centre of the novel, holds an incredible power that dominates largely through fear: Miss Edge worries about ‘this long horrible rigmarole of Reports’ (135), Liz too is worried about ‘what an Enquiry means’ (138), and the State even intrudes into private life since ‘[w]hen one of the staff takes a wife the State always moves him to another post’ (141) – this is one of the reasons Sebastian and Liz do not marry. And while the State rules from above, the girls rule the school from below. At the dance, when Rock is sexually enticed by several girls, they speak of ‘our Club rules and regulations’ (181), and they give Rock ‘the Club Special’, a drink of initiation in the ‘underground passage’ (182). This mimicry of State and Institute authority occurs

even among the students who are otherwise indistinguishable (their names are Marion, Mary, Merode, Maisy, Margot, Moira, Muriel, etc.), but their efforts are revealed at the end to be worthless, as even the mentally ill Liz notes: ‘That’s only their Club they think is so secret, and everybody knows. They go and whoop round the place at night’ (201). In other words, no one is able to create genuine authority within the school: the children fail in their efforts at replicating adult authority and remain childish, the directors are afraid of their masters, and the State itself, the power behind it all, never surfaces, giving the entire novel the appearance of a confidence trick in which everyone is complicit, everyone thinking themselves in control but in fact being a plaything for others.

The main thrust of Green’s critique of education can also be used to reflect on the purpose of the novel. Ever since its emergence as a modern and popular genre in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the novel has been considered an instrument of education. Novels can only be justified, Diderot notes in ‘Éloge de Richardson’ (1762), which was written in the midst of debates about their threat to public morals, if they ‘elevate the spirit ... touch the soul ... [and] infuse everywhere love of the good’.<sup>153</sup> Even Rousseau, who prefaced *La Nouvelle Héloïse* with the statement that novels appear only among corrupt people, felt that the genre was saved by imparting moral lessons. While the novel did not need such vocal defence in the interwar period, a number of writers who found their works censored took up education as a justification: so Radclyffe Hall, D.H. Lawrence, and James Joyce all defended obscenity, as had the

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<sup>153</sup> Denis Diderot, ‘Éloge de Richardson’, in *Œuvres esthétiques*, ed. by Paul Vernière (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 1994), pp. 29-34 (p. 29).

Marquis de Sade earlier, by claiming to speak the truth about reality (and thus use the novel to educate its reader). But by constantly undermining the authority of education, Green removes this possible justification for the novel. In his hands, the genre does not work through its public morality but through the reader's private appropriation of experience. The novel has to treat suitably universal subjects to reach a variety of readers, but it cannot impart a universal message because that would alienate those readers. The force and power of education antagonize the freedom of spirit that education is meant to provide, and so the novel must transcend this category and move towards a greater openness.

### **Conclusion**

Green's engagement with the status of authority was formal rather than political, as his writing decentred both narrative authority and the high-art claims of authorship. This was all part of a larger project of 'breaking up' the novel, by which he meant the traditional bourgeois narrative with omniscient narration and an underlying realism that concealed an ideologically charged worldview. Yet the project was not complete or total, with moments where Green shows what is lost by the complete abandonment of authority. The possibility of a complete escape, of absolute freedom, is denied, as his characters – and readers – always are immersed in the larger world where authority and power are adamant in their hold.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SENSING THE WHOLE

Disability is one of the most prominent thematic, formal and stylistic devices in Green's fiction. In *Nothing*, Arthur Morris first has a toe amputated, then his leg below the knee, and then the entire leg: there's just '[n]o knowing where these things'll stop' (39). If health for the Victorians was 'a state of functional and structural *wholeness*', by the 1920s this philosophy of holism was coming to be questioned by a number of writers and theorists.<sup>1</sup> Green joined this attack in his own way; his disabling of characters, language, and narrative form metaphorically conveys the mutilation of the individual, social and literary body. His style, with its conscious 'dislocations of syntax', amputation of the adverbial '-ly' ending and omission of the definite article, tears apart standard English usage.<sup>2</sup> The disconnection between plot, action and character undermines the possibility of a formally coherent fictional whole. His narrative restraint, I have argued earlier, does not panoramically order the field of vision or satisfy the reader's expectations of full

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Haley, *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 20; Ward, *Nineteen Twenties*, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Swinden, *English Novel of History and Society*, p. 60.

exposition and satisfying closure. Finally, the search for ‘communion’, the coming together of an organic community (the football match in *Living*, the servants’ dinner in *Loving* and the founder’s dance in *Concluding*), is typically aborted, with Green showing the limits of a ‘sensus communis’. Rather than negatively stereotyping disability, I shall argue that Green continually works to show that difference is an integral aspect of the novel and the world itself.

While a number of critics have drawn attention to this, the study of disability within his novels remains confined to discrete works.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, I shall argue that disability is central to Green’s poetics. I shall begin by contextualizing early 20<sup>th</sup> century disability. In this section I shall also look at what insights the field of disabilities studies literature provides for Green. The next section examines three manifestations of disability in his novels. I do not interpret *Blindness* metaphorically, which is the dominant mode of proceeding, but through the specific context of socially integrating the recently blinded. I shall then analyse the structural effects of physical amputation for reading *Back* and then conclude the section by investigating the role of deafness within *Caught* and *Concluding*. The next section investigates Green’s use of language. Theorizing style as a physical body, I shall argue that Green’s conscious manipulation and distortion of the ‘natural’ body of language and syntax is significant from a disability studies perspective. I consider how Green sought to individualize his style, to make his language uniquely his own, and argue

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<sup>3</sup> On *Blindness*, see Aebischer, ‘Creative Disability/Disabled Creativity’ and Brothers, ‘Blindness: The Eye of Henry Green’; on the wartime novels, see Deeming, ‘Henry Green’s War’, Miller, ‘The War of the Roses’, Ferguson, ‘Blind Noise and Deaf Visions’ and Stonebridge, ‘Bombs and Roses’; on his late novels, see Bragg, ‘The Hard-of-Hearing and the Hardly Heard’.

that Green never developed a signature language. His ‘disabling’ of syntax, I shall argue, was not, unlike the suggestions of most critics, inexplicable but served a particular purpose, namely to highlight the intrinsic qualities of language itself and to question the means by which it comes to be possessed both by speakers and readers. I shall conclude with a broad investigation of the artistic unity, the physical wholeness, of Green’s fiction, which includes not only the search for an organic community but also the problem of closure.

### **Modernist disabilities**

In 1940 Bakhtin noted that modern European literature contained a ‘boundless ocean of grotesque bodily imagery.’<sup>4</sup> The importance of that observation has been recognised in the last two decades by a growing number of scholars examining literary representations of disability and interrogating the philosophical assumptions of the normal/disabled binary. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder speak of the ‘perpetual discursive dependency upon disability’, noting that ‘the narrative of disability’s very unknowability ... consolidates the need to tell a story about it’ but this story, they note, typically involves ‘an erasure of difference’.<sup>5</sup> In his study of the early cinema, Martin Norden shows how films from 1910 to the early 1920s with disabled characters had a singular ideological meaning, ‘a sentimental optimism of

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<sup>4</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1968), p. 319.

<sup>5</sup> David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), pp. 47, 5, 7.

the restored-to-able-bodiedness' that effaced, through either miracles or science, abnormality.<sup>6</sup> Disability is always evaluated from the vantage point of the able-bodied, Rosemarie Garland Thomson argues:

The very act of representing corporeal otherness places them [disabled bodies] in a frame that highlights their difference from ostensibly normate readers. ... A disability functions only as visual difference that signals meanings. Consequently, literary texts necessarily make disabled characters into freaks, stripped of normalizing contexts and engulfed by a single stigmatic trait.<sup>7</sup>

Lennard Davis's ambitious rewriting of literary history from the perspective of disability is built upon the idea that the novel is an ideological construction engaged in the reproduction of the normative and the normal.<sup>8</sup> Like a number of other disabilities studies scholars, Davis relies upon Michel Foucault's argument that the 'norm' is the basis upon which 'power is found established and legitimate', which, Foucault continues, leads state and social institutions to suppress or normalize the abnormal.<sup>9</sup> Disabilities studies scholars note that disability is often 'an opportunistic metaphorical device' for writers.<sup>10</sup> Because readers do not identify with disabled

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<sup>6</sup> Martin F. Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), p. 74.

<sup>7</sup> Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 10-1. Although on the rise of the disabled body memoir, see G. Thomas Couser, *Signifying Bodies: Disability in Contemporary Life Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Lennard J. Davis, *Bending Over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), p. 104.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, *Les anormaux, Cours au Collège de France (1974-1975)*, ed. by François Ewald and Alessandro Fontana (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 1999), p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, p. 47.

characters, the latter cannot be protagonists but are marginalized into serving as villains, figures of comic relief or objects of pity.<sup>11</sup>

A number of scholars have worked to reveal the importance of disability to modernism. Their starting point is invariably the First World War, which reoriented literature towards a closer intimacy with the human body in all its forms. Rod Edmond observes that

[t]he body in pieces, whether fragmented or mutilated, has often been used as a way of expressing a distinctively modern sense of the loss of wholeness and coherence. This became marked around the turn of the twentieth century when biological theories of decline were increasingly applied to social theory, and the body itself became a source of knowledge about society rather than merely a way of thinking about it.<sup>12</sup>

Hal Foster argues that modernists disfigured or mutilated the natural body or fitted the body into a larger network of the machine.<sup>13</sup> In their 1941 social survey of the interwar period, Robert Graves and Alan Hodge noted that the ‘natural’ body had largely faded from public view due to ‘deliberate distortion by cinema cartoon, by caricatures, by fashion plates elongating women to a prescribed 150 per cent of their natural proportions, and by streamlined modernistic car-mascots and such ....’<sup>14</sup> Tim Armstrong, while acknowledging the importance of the body disabled by the war, also finds modern advertising putting forth ‘the image of the perfected body,’ which

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<sup>11</sup> Lennard J. Davis, ‘Constructing Normalcy: The Bell Curve, the Novel, and the Invention of the Disabled Body in the Nineteenth Century’, in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. by Lennard J. Davis (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 9-28 (p. 21).

<sup>12</sup> Rod Edmond, ‘Home and Away: Degeneration in Imperialist and Modernist Discourse’, in *Modernism and Empire*, ed. by Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 39-63 (p. 49). Also see Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1999), Chapter 3.

<sup>13</sup> Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), p. 110.

<sup>14</sup> Graves and Hodge, *Long Week-End*, p. 195.



turned the consumer's body into 'a zone of deficits ... with matching remedies' that only products could provide.<sup>15</sup>

While the two world wars were bloodier than any of their predecessors, advances in medical science – the only progress war brings, James Phillips says in *Back* (10) – meant that more injured men survived, though perhaps with an arm or leg less.<sup>16</sup> The first number of *The Cripples' Journal*, a review put out by the Shropshire Orthopaedic Hospital, appeared in 1924 to meet an 'emphatic' need: 'There has never been a period in the history of deformity when accurate information, based upon long and careful experience, could prove more welcome or more desirable.'<sup>17</sup> The largest supplier of prosthetic legs in Britain fitted over 250,000 legs between 1915 and 1948; in the U.S.A., there were one million amputees in 1950.<sup>18</sup> The 400,000 British soldiers disabled in the Great War, of whom one-tenth underwent an amputation, were called by *The Times* 'the cream of our race', who '[i]n their bodies ... bear the heritage of all our endeavours since we became a people ....'<sup>19</sup> For soldiers, mutilation and disability were more feared than death, veteran Rowland Luther noted: 'I didn't mind dying, but the fear of mutilation

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<sup>15</sup> Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body*, p. 98.

<sup>16</sup> '[T]he developments in prosthesis of all kinds brought by the present war would already furnish material for a large volume.' See 'The History of Prosthesis', *British Medical Journal*, 20 January 1917, p. 96. The introduction of the Thomas splint reduced the mortality rate from fractures from 80 percent in 1916 to under 20 percent in 1918; see Seth Koven, 'Remembering and Dismemberment: Crippled Children, Wounded Soldiers, and the Great War in Great Britain', *American Historical Review*, 99 (1994), 1167-1202 (p. 1187).

<sup>17</sup> Robert Jones, 'The Ultimate Objective', *Cripples' Journal*, 1.1 (July 1924), 3-6 (p. 4).

<sup>18</sup> *The Times*, 29 June 1948, p. 5; John R. Glover, 'The Major Amputations', *American Journal of Nursing*, 50 (1950), 544-50 (p. 544).

<sup>19</sup> *The Times*, 2 March 1917, p. 2. In 1922, Geoffrey Howson estimated that 41,000 men had a limb amputated during the war; see *Handbook for the Limbless* (London: Disabled Society, 1922), p. xii.

played havoc with our minds. I had seen much of it, and wanted to die whole.<sup>20</sup> The shell-shocked victim of Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) recounts a battlefield joke: 'We were all of us in a barn one night, and a shell came along. My pal sang out, "Help me, old man, I've got no legs!" and I had to answer, "I can't, old man, I've got no hands!"'<sup>21</sup> An American nurse, Mary Borden, described the cutting up of the soldier's body:

There are heads and knees and mangled testicles. There are chests with holes as big as our fist, and pulpy thighs, shapeless; and stumps where legs once were fastened. There are eyes—eyes of sick dogs, sick cats, blind eyes, eyes of delirium; and mouths that cannot articulate; and parts of faces—the nose gone, or the jaw. There are these things, but no men.<sup>22</sup>

Vera Brittain also had to get used to 'the butcher's shop appearance' of wounded soldiers and the 'grotesque mutilations of bodies and limbs and faces'.<sup>23</sup> But the disabled were not confined to military hospitals or private homes; after the war, '[m]ass-mutilation was there for all to see.'<sup>24</sup> At the same time Virginia Woolf was writing *Jacob's Room* (1922), whose themes of absence and fragmentation were typically modernist, she noted in her diary that 'stiff legs, single legs, sticks shod with rubber, & empty sleeves are common enough.'<sup>25</sup> For Fredric Manning, 'it is infinitely more horrible and revolting to see a man shattered and eviscerated, than to

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<sup>20</sup> Qtd. in Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996), p. 56.

<sup>21</sup> Rebecca West, *The Return of the Soldier* (London: Virago, 1980 [1918]), p. 14 (emphasis original).

<sup>22</sup> Mary Borden, *The Forbidden Zone* (London: Heinemann, 1929), pp. 64-5. For an excellent analysis, see Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (London: Virago, 1978 [1933]), p. 211.

<sup>24</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 35.

<sup>25</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell, 5 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1977-1984), II, 92-3.

see him shot.’<sup>26</sup> One German veteran put it in perspective: ‘Bodily injury as a mass phenomenon, or rather the massive appearance of bodily injury – that is the novelty this war has produced.’<sup>27</sup>

In the Second World War, the number of disabled was even higher. Not only soldiers but also civilians were targeted in this ‘total war’.<sup>28</sup> In one London hospital, Queen Mary’s, over 2,000 amputations had taken place by 1943.<sup>29</sup> There were so many disabled civilians and veterans that the government could not afford to pay them full pensions; single-limb amputees, after a series of cuts during the war, were receiving only 30 per cent of a full pension.<sup>30</sup>

This mass mutilation of bodies was everywhere, John Galsworthy remarked: ‘In every street, on every road and village-green we meet them—crippled, half crippled, or showing little outward trace, though none the less secretly deprived of health.’<sup>31</sup> In the summer of 1918, Galsworthy took editorial control of a magazine put out by the Ministry of Pensions for disabled soldiers, *Reveille*. Its first issue sold 30,000 copies and had contributions by Kipling, Beerbohm, J.M. Barrie, Conrad, E.V. Lucas and Jerome K. Jerome; its later numbers featured poetry by Hardy, Masfield, Sassoon and Graves and articles by G.K. Chesterton, Edith Wharton and

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<sup>26</sup> Fredric Manning, *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (London: Peter Davies, 1977 [1929]), p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> Karl von Kügelgen, *Nicht Krüppel – Sieger! Gedanken und Erfahrungen eines Einarmigen* (Langensalza: Hermann Beyer & Söhne, 1919), p. 53; qtd. in Mia Fineman, ‘Ecco Homo Protheticus’, *New German Critique*, 76 (Winter 1999), 85-114 (p. 88). Fineman notes that Germany had approximately 80,000 amputees.

<sup>28</sup> *The Times*, 22 March 1943, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> *The Times*, 7 Oct 1943, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> *The Times*, 28 Sept 1942, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> John Galsworthy, ‘The Gist of the Matter’, *Reveille*, 1 (August 1918), p. 14.

Hilaire Belloc.<sup>32</sup> While Galsworthy resigned his editorship because of governmental interference (he became increasingly critical towards what he thought was a neglectful policy towards veterans), writers and artists began to engage disability in their productions. In Weimar, over 150 art works were centred on the theme or image of the mutilated body; the most famous ones include Otto Dix's *The Skat Players* (1920), the works of George Grosz, and the photographs compiled in Ernst Friedrich's *Krieg dem Kriege* (1924), a European best-seller.<sup>33</sup> The notion of disabled bodies and societies influenced Dada and Surrealism. One of the most iconic images of the early art cinema, from *Un Chien andalou* (1929), is an eye cut by a razor. That same year, André Breton proclaimed that Surrealism was driven by 'our willingness to completely defamiliarize everything ... right up to the point of defamiliarizing a hand by isolating it from an arm.'<sup>34</sup> For disabled veteran Louis-Ferdinand Céline, a writer Green admired, cut-up sentences and fragmented language physically reflected wartime mutilation. In other cultural and social fields, the notion of dismemberment and amputation gained ground. In psychoanalysis, Melanie Klein speaks of a super-ego which 'devours, dismembers and castrates', while Freud defined psychoanalysis through its attempt 'to understand both normal

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<sup>32</sup> John Galsworthy, Notebook, in H.V. Marrot, *The Life and Letters of John Galsworthy* (London: Heinemann, 1935), p. 444.

<sup>33</sup> Catherine Wermester, 'Métaphores de la déficience dans l'art allemand de la République de Weimar', in *Le Handicap en images: les représentations de la déficience dans les oeuvres d'art*, ed. by Alain Blanc and Henri-Jacques Stiker (Ramonville Saint-Agne: Éditions Érès, 2003), pp. 105-110 (p. 105).

<sup>34</sup> André Breton, 'Avis au Lecteur', Preface to Max Ernst, *La Femme 100 Têtes* (Paris: Éditions de l'Oeil, 1956 [1929]), p. 3.

and pathological processes as parts of the same natural course of events.’<sup>35</sup> In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929/30), Freud famously called man a ‘prosthetic God’ – he himself had a rubber jaw fitted in 1923 after being operated on for jaw cancer.<sup>36</sup>

Henry Green was intimately familiar with the sight of physical disability, having lived, in David Deeming’s phrase, ‘a damaged life.’<sup>37</sup> When he was a child during the war, Forthampton Court was converted to a recuperation centre for wounded officers. Twenty would come at a time, and young Henry developed close ties with them, even becoming their ‘mascot’ (*PMB*, 72). Green would take them fishing or on bicycle rides. The plight of these wounded men, who had come to be nursed only to get sent back to die, was a defining experience. The memory of one Australian officer, who had been gassed and then blown up by a shell, haunted Green many years later: ‘He was no longer human when he came to us’ (*PMB*, 62). This chilly sentence stands out for its bleakness in a writer known for his darkness.

While this early engagement with disability was personal and raw, and probably not fully comprehensible for the boy home on holidays, during the Second World War Green confronted bodily and material destruction on a daily basis. Katherine Miller is mistaken to state that ‘Green himself never saw action’ during the Second World War.<sup>38</sup> He may not have fired a gun, but as a volunteer fireman in

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<sup>35</sup> Melanie Klein, ‘Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict’ (1928), in *The Selected Melanie Klein*, ed. by Juliet Mitchell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 69-83 (p. 75); Sigmund Freud, ‘Address Delivered in the Goethe House at Frankfurt’, in *Standard Edition*, XXI, 208-12 (p. 208).

<sup>36</sup> Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in *Standard Edition*, XXI, 93.

<sup>37</sup> Deeming, ‘Henry Green’s War’, p. 866.

<sup>38</sup> Miller, *British Literature of the Blitz*, p. 83.

what he later called a ‘suicide job’, he was called in to sift through the rubble of bombed homes, first searching for survivors and then seeing to it that scattered body parts were collected.<sup>39</sup> Green tried to write a nonfiction book on the Blitz, provisionally entitled ‘London and Fire, 1940’, but kept breaking down in tears while working on it.

### **Green’s Disabled Bodies**

The disabled protagonists in Green’s fiction include the blind (John Hays), the hard of hearing (Richard Roe, Mr Rock), and the amputated (Charley Summers). There are also a number of minor characters with disabilities, from the mute gardener Paddy in *Loving* who only speaks ‘in sibilants and gutturals’ (97) to the two-limbed amputee in *Nothing*, William Smith, whose wife has to pour whiskey down his throat. After she sees ‘a war wounded man with a stump for an arm’ at the Brighton pier, young Penelope refuses to let go of her arm for fear that it will fall off (*Nothing*, 57). Physical settings are also disabling: the factory in *Living* can be conceptualized in Engels’s terms as a site where workers’ bodies are maimed (the near-accident described in the opening) or cast aside because of old age (Craig’s situation). The schools in *Blindness*, *Concluding*, and *Pack My Bag* deform the student and hamper his self-development. Finally, the London of *Caught* can be likened to a physical

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<sup>39</sup> Lambourne, ‘No Thundering Horses’, p. 61.

body assaulted by the Luftwaffe, a common trope in war novels.<sup>40</sup> Green's three novels without a gerund title (*Blindness*, *Caught*, and *Back*) all feature protagonists undergoing a traumatic disability: Haye is blinded, Roe is nearly deaf and is removed from his work after suffering a nervous breakdown, and Summers has recently been amputated. Disability is central to these novels, undermining one of the key tenets of disability studies scholars, that disability is rarely the focal point in artistic representations but is usually sidelined to minor characters.<sup>41</sup> The disabilities upon which Green focuses are those that Aristotle identified as pre-eminently human in *Historia Animalium*: the voluptuous sensations (taste, touch, and smell) are shared with all animals but hearing and vision are pleasures only for man.<sup>42</sup> It is important to note that there are no congenital disabilities in Green's fiction; disability, rather than being an inescapable condition, is a process connected to a larger world.

In this section, I examine three disabilities within his novels: blindness, lameness, and deafness. I first look to *Blindness*, which I read not metaphorically, but rather as a story about social reintegration, which in the early 1920s was a pressing social problem since a large number of soldiers were blinded during the war. This reading supports my earlier analysis of the novel's professionalization of

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<sup>40</sup> 'The heavy raids continued. Their scale, both in time and space, impressed Ford. As he walked the streets, he could fancy that he heard the laboured breath of London. Her incoherent vastness was stretched beneath the night and the raiders. Then, and then again, the hammer stroke of a heavy bomb plunged into the body of the city. London stirred, quivered, and caught her breath as if wounded. She was wounded, again and again.' John Strachey, *Post D: Some Experiences of an Air Raid Warden* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1941), p. 43. This novel was one of the publishing sensations of 1941. In its isolation of an air raid warden and its focus both on the fighting involved but also the human relationships within this close-knit community, it was a predecessor to *Caught*.

<sup>41</sup> See Davis, 'Constructing Normalcy', p. 21.

<sup>42</sup> Aristotle, *Hist. Anim.*, 611b. Schopenhauer called sight and hearing 'the nobler senses'; see Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E.F.J. Payne, 2 vols (New York: Dover, 1966), I, 26 (Chapter 2, section.3).

young authors, for, if anything, the issue surrounding blind soldiers was how they could be socially integrated into economically productive labour. I then examine *Back*, which I argue is structurally dependent upon Charley Summers's physical immobility. His 'peg leg' is mentioned early in the novel but then fades from view. This does not prevent it, I argue, from playing a major role in establishing the novel's geographical frame. Finally, I investigate Green's use of deafness in *Caught* and *Concluding*. While some critics have dismissed the importance of deafness in these works, saying that it does not serve any narrative purpose, I argue that deafness is critical to understanding both Green's poetics and the story of these two novels.

### *Blindness and writing*

A contemporary review of *Blindness* appearing in the *Illustrated London News* is a good starting point for contextualizing the novel's position with regards to the social conditions surrounding blindness in the 1920s:

The problem of a boy's career becomes infinitely more difficult when, as the time of choice approaches, he is suddenly struck with a great physical affliction. Such a case is the subject of a remarkable novel, 'BLINDNESS,' by Henry Green (Dent; 7s. 6d. net), in which the principal character is a public schoolboy of eighteen or nineteen, who loses his sight through an urchin's mischievous prank. It is a painful subject, but one of a kind which the war made familiar, and therefore legitimate matter for psychological treatment.<sup>43</sup>

The question of blindness was, the review noted, an important one for 1920s Britain. The government's primary objective was economic reintegration, making the blind fit for productive labour. The Departmental Committee on the Welfare of the Blind,

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<sup>43</sup> 'Books of the Day', *London Illustrated News*, 1 January 1927, p. 12.



which released its first major report in 1917, called for ‘more active intervention of the State’ to integrate the blind into the workforce; indeed, its definition of blindness was not medical but industrial: ‘Blindness means too blind to perform work for which eyesight is essential.’<sup>44</sup> By the end of the war, over 1,300 British soldiers had been blinded, which brought the problem of retraining them ‘very keenly to the fore.’<sup>45</sup> A Labour Party MP had this to say in support of the 1920 Blind (Education, Employment, and Maintenance) Bill:

God’s greatest gift was eyesight, and to be denied it was to be deprived of life’s greatest privilege. We were not capable of miracles like the Nazarene, but we could, at least, substitute friendship and sympathy; that would inspire the blind in their work, and bestow upon them the great blessing of occupation.<sup>46</sup>

A 1923 Ministry of Health Circular continued this push towards economic reintegration: ‘The primary object of training a blind person should be to fit him for following some definite vocation in which he can become in greater or lesser degree self-supporting.’<sup>47</sup> Douglas McMurtrie, director of the Red Cross Institute for Crippled and Disabled Men, noted that ‘the day when the mutilated occupies a regular employment marks the definitive success of the work of re-education undertaken.’<sup>48</sup> The monthly magazine *Les Mutilés*, published in Oran, noted that the

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<sup>44</sup> *The Times*, 14 August 1917, p. 4. Arthur Pearson, the director of St. Dunstan’s, also defined blindness as the inability ‘to do ordinary work in an ordinary way.’ See his *Victory Over Blindness: How It Was Won by the Men of St. Dunstan’s and How Others May Win It* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), p. 28.

<sup>45</sup> Arnold Lawson, *War Blindness at St. Dunstan’s* (London: Henry Frowde and Hodder and Stoughton, 1922), p. 127. In *Caught Pye* recalls ‘lines of men coming back in single file, their hands on each other’s shoulders, blinded’ (17).

<sup>46</sup> *The Times*, 13 March 1920, p. 9.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Welfare of the Blind: Co-Operation between Training and Employing Agencies’, *Beacon*, 7.78 (June 1923), p. 3. The *Beacon* was a journal devoted to social problems faced by the blind.

<sup>48</sup> Douglas C. McMurtrie, *Les Mutilés de la guerre* (Paris: Masson et Cie, 1920), p. 66.

disabled veteran's greatest suffering was not physical but being rendered 'unfit for his habitual profession'.<sup>49</sup> Henri-Jacques Stiker notes that the war brought an ideological change in policies toward disabled persons by making it so that 'they have to be returned to ordinary life, to ordinary work.'<sup>50</sup>

The question of a career is the central problem for John Haye. Unable to complete his schooling, he is forced to go back home to his stepmother who worries about his 'afterlife' now that 'you will miss your last term, which is so important they tell me' (368). Mrs Haye's fears stem from a social understanding of education and careers ('they tell me'). She later muses, 'They must find some occupation for the boy ... Making fancy baskets, or pen-wipers, all those things blinded soldiers did, something to do' (384) – she is alluding to Saint Dunstan's, the London hospital where many blind veterans were trained for careers and which received royal patronage after the war. Mrs Haye is worried about John's economic future: 'Now that he was blind there was no hope of his ever making any money' (386). The appearance of a blind piano tuner signals John's depressing career prospects (443). Another inauspicious parallel to John's future is the family dog, Raffles, who has lost his sight in old age, leading Mrs Haye to wonder whether the '[p]oor blind old thing' should be 'destroyed' (382), which would be 'practical' – 'it is cruel to let him live' (401).

One employment, though, remains open to John. Writing, he believes, is 'the only thing in which the blind are not hampered' (463). In the first depicted scene

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<sup>49</sup> *Les Mutilés*, 54 (April 1922), p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability*, trans. by William Sayers (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 128.

after his blinding, Mrs Hays offers to take down his stories and read aloud ‘all your nice books’ (371). When her offer is dismissed, she promises to engage ‘a professional reader’ (393). Yet she cannot believe in writing as a possible career; she calls John’s writing a ‘hobby’ and tells him, ‘but no one has ever written on either side of the family’ (481). Yet family life does not attract John: his children will be books, which is alluded to in the first scene with his stepmother, who has arrived late because she had been visiting ‘Mrs Green’s baby. It’s her first, so she’s making a fuss of it ...’ (368).

Writing, rather than allowing John Hays to become reintegrated into society or his family, further distances him from it. He promises to devote himself to writing: ‘he had really worked quite hard at writing, and he would go on now, there was time when one was blind’ (394). This desire to write, though, is complicated by his growing isolation: ‘He felt the grass, but it was not the same as the grass he had seen ... He was shut out, into himself, in the cold’ (395). Words and objects have been severed from their intimate connection:

He said ‘tree’ out loud and it was a word. He saw branches with vague substances blocked round them, and he built up a picture of lawn and tree, but there were gaps, and his brain reeled from the effort of filling them. (394)

While that paragon of the young artist, Stephen Dedalus, comes to experience his ‘consciousness of language ... ebbing from his brain and trickling into the very words themselves’, John does not possess language but finds it dividing him.<sup>51</sup> Rather than wholeness, writing would be a kind of cutting, he tells Joan:

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<sup>51</sup> Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 203.

But now, do you know what I am going to do now? After all, one must have something to put against one's name. For I am going to write, yes, to write. Such books, June, such amazing tales, rich with intricate plot. Life will be clotted and I will dissect it, choosing little bits to analyse. I shall be a great writer. I am sure of it. (463)

This dialogue begins by John describing his earlier dream of 'a public life of the greatest possible brilliance' (462). Because that is now impossible, 'I must justify myself somehow', which makes writing pure narcissism: 'I will be a great writer one day, and people will be brought to see the famous blind man who lends people in his books the eyes that he lost ...' (463).

The notion of the writer gifting vision to the reader is an ancient one, and literature has often considered vision the supreme sense. Varro writes: '*Cerno* "I see" is said from *cereo*, that is *creo* "I create"; it is said from this fact, that when something has been created, then finally it is seen.'<sup>52</sup> 'Our Sight is the most perfect and most delightful of all our Senses,' Addison writes, because it provides fuel for the imagination, and through 'this Faculty a Man in a Dungeon is capable of entertaining himself with Scenes and Landskips more beautiful than any that can be found in the whole Compass of Nature.'<sup>53</sup> The incontestable philosophy when the novel emerged in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century was empiricism, which argued that the mind was an 'Empty Cabinet' filled up by a succession of associative ideas, which arrived through the senses, of which the most elementary was sight.<sup>54</sup> In the opening chapter

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<sup>52</sup> Varro, *On the Latin Language*, trans. by Roland G. Kent, 2 vols (London: Heinemann, Loeb Classics, 1938), I, 249 (VI.81).

<sup>53</sup> *Spectator*, 21 June 1712, in *The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from The Tatler and The Spectator*, ed. by Erin Mackie (Boston: Bedford, 1998), p. 387.

<sup>54</sup> In French, *apercevoir* is to perceive, *savoir* to know, *pouvoir* to have power to, to be able, *avoir* to have: all from *voir*, to see.

of Locke's epistemology, 'the Understanding' is said to be very much 'like the Eye', an idea dominating philosophy since Plato's metaphor of the cave and the opening lines of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. The novel, by this reckoning, had to provide the reader a chain of sensory experiences, and the most effective ones were those that gave the reader sight. Conrad's preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897) is the most famous expression of this sentiment: 'My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*. That—and no more, and it is everything.'<sup>55</sup>

Green's work, though, never sought to provide a full sensory field to the novel or to order its physical body into a unified, coherent whole. In Chapter Two, I argued that *Living's* Birmingham is visually stunted, with few descriptive passages of the working-class district. Unlike avant-garde artists who used visual elements in their texts (Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*), beginning with *Party Going* Green refused to provide even chapter breaks or numbers to divide up the textual field for the reader. His desire for a book to be 'blind' (*PMB*, 84) finds curious expression in the ledger book of the dead butler Eldon, which Raunce in *Loving* cannot make heads or tails of, its entries so dense and incomprehensible that it cannot serve as a guide – the map inside the ledger book, appropriately for this blind text, had 'no names against places' (49).

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<sup>55</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'Preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*' (1897), in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', Typhoon and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 13. Paul Klee's 'Creative Credo' (1920) begins: 'Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible.' See *The Inward Vision*, trans. by Norbert Guterman (New York: Harry Abrams, 1959), p. 5.

In *Blindness*, John's failure to make writing a kind of second sight is evident. When first asked what blindness is like, he answers, 'I don't know, everything's black, that's all' (369). The basic incommunicability of his experience is never overcome. His physical blindness has set him apart from others, but this was already the case beforehand. John Haye's diary is not so much about himself but a way of watching over himself through the eyes of his schoolfellows. His vision is slanted and indirect. The persistence of certain visual expressions in the diary – 'at a glance' (343), 'a great eye-opener' (345), 'being seen talking to you' (347), 'distressingly the athletic type ... blind and almost ignorant of any world outside their own' (348) – reinforce this reading.<sup>56</sup> The blindness is not something new; it was with John the entire time, and his attempts to write are not exempt from it. If anything, his blindness leads him to imagine his writing turning into 'a crusade against people who had eyesight' (502). The push to reintegrate the blind into a career, rather than allowing John to flourish, is what diminishes his artistic potential, for writing is no longer a means of communicating experience truthfully but turned into a profession not of faith but of economic productivity.

### *Limping into the past*

It is difficult to consider physical disability central to *Back* when the novel never tells us which of Charley Summers' legs is amputated. It appears that Green treats disability in the same way Beckett did for Molloy, who is not aware which of his two

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<sup>56</sup> See Mengham, *Idiom of the Time*, p. 2.

legs is lame. Amputation, by this logic, is a metaphorical marker, not a specific reality. In *Back* this metaphor of disability extends to language: ‘[e]verything’s initials these days’ (19).<sup>57</sup> The novel exploits this metaphor of amputation to the full, alternating between the poles of absence and its replacement, the amputated leg and its prosthetic substitute, dead Rose and the newly blossomed love for Nancy, the constant opposition between earth and metal – and there are doubles everywhere, from second-hand bookshops, deaths from a second stroke, and, most obviously, the second great war. But in order to see what amputation means in the novel, one also must consider its physical manifestations.

The novel begins with an unnamed young man getting off a country bus, but ‘carefully because he had a peg leg’ (5). He ‘ran his eye with caution’ over his destination (5), a graveyard, where he hopes to find the tomb of his dead lover, Rose. The unwritten music in the scene is the tapping out of his ill-fitting wooden leg while searching for Rose’s tomb: a nineteenth-century artificial limb producer noted that wooden legs ‘betrayed the wearer at every step.’<sup>58</sup> This calling out to bodies underground is a fitting commentary upon the search’s futility and how out of place

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<sup>57</sup> The power of social institutions over the disabled is a prominent theme in much disabilities study literature, with disability often seen as making ‘a person available for excessive experimentation and bureaucratic oversight’. See Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 16 (emphasis original). This is not the case in *Back*: while the abbreviated institutions seem to run people’s lives, Charley for the most part happily ignores bureaucratic orders telling where and when to appear.

<sup>58</sup> A.A. Marks, *A Treatise on Marks’ Patent Artificial Limbs with Rubber Hands and Feet* (New York, 1888), p. 151; qtd. in Erin O’Connor, “‘Fractions of Men’: Engendering Amputation in Victorian Culture”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 39 (October 1997), 742-77 (p. 768).

Charley – lame like Oedipus but lacking the answers to the riddle – is.<sup>59</sup> The eventual coming on of rain is the crescendo ending this unbearable, hapless search.

Charley's movement is described a number of times in the opening pages: he gets out of the bus 'carefully' (5), he moves 'slowly', 'dragging the peg leg' (6); he starts 'to drag as quick as he could' but has 'to go sideways ... because he could not lift his leg properly' (9); and he begins 'to drag after' James Phillips '[b]ut he could not go fast, with the result that he was far behind' (12): the accumulated modifiers paint a picture of dragging and slowness. But in this first scene, Charley has an ill-fitting wooden leg. When Green was writing *Back*, wooden legs were discouraged because they did 'not have the mechanical features of a permanent artificial leg'.<sup>60</sup> When Charley gets, after this first scene, the 'new limb waiting there numb and numbered' for him (8), there is almost no description of Charley's movement. This silence might be due to the fact that prosthetic legs were significantly lighter than wooden ones, in most cases by a few pounds, and so walking would be easier and less noisy. Yet neither the operation for his prosthetic nor the original amputation is described. His manner of walking is rarely mentioned – with the exception of one scene when, in despair over Rose, Charley tries to run through London:

He looked about for a taxi, damn the expense for he had no time. He ran across traffic at a cab moving the other way, and, as he went, it was like a magpie with a broken wing, he flopped along, but the flag was down, the taxi taken. He straggled back to an island. (58)

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<sup>59</sup> The scene also calls to mind the folklore that an amputated limb should be buried underground so that the amputee can be physically whole in the afterlife. Even as late as 1900, the director of a Cardiff hospital admitted that amputated limbs were put in the same coffin as the body (*Western Mail*, 21 November 1900).

<sup>60</sup> Margaret S. Avery, 'The Care of Patients with Amputations', *American Journal of Nursing*, 44 (February 1944), 113-9 (p. 114). See also *Artificial Limbs. Report of the Departmental Committee Appointed by the Ministry of Pensions* (London: HMSO, 1945).



Although he is running as if his life depended upon it, we know that he has been set off by another delusion. The return ‘to an island’ is representative of his repatriation, but stranded on that traffic island, there is both safety from the passing cars but also helplessness at being stuck. Yet such bathos is rare, for the novel otherwise does not mention his disability.

If one considers Peter Hays’s analysis that limping represents infertility and impotence, then the novel’s growing silence about Charley’s walk contains within it a symbolic message.<sup>61</sup> In W. Somerset Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage* (1915), the best-known contemporary novel with a limping protagonist (and, in 1946, the year of *Back*’s publication, an American film version of it came out), after an intellectual friend takes a look at Philip Carey’s club foot and says, ‘I suppose you don’t dance’, the narrator intrudes into Philip’s thoughts to note that he ‘felt that no woman could ever really look upon him without distaste for his deformity.’<sup>62</sup> In *Back*, one can certainly plot Charley’s limp against his perceived sexual potency and find the correspondences compelling. His limp is most pronounced at the novel’s beginning, where he is first searching for Rose and is thrown into confusion about his possible paternity of Ridley; the recognition scene is turned on its head when Charley, because of his current physical woes, denies his past while seemingly searching for it. In the passage quoted above, the limp reappears: Charley cannot accept that Rose is not in this world. But because his eventual blossoming love with Nancy will

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<sup>61</sup> Peter Hays, *The Limping Hero: Grotesques in Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1971).

<sup>62</sup> W. Somerset Maugham, *Of Human Bondage* (New York: The Modern Library, 1999 [1915]), p. 159.

restore his sexual potency, the limp can be unnamed and unseen as the novel progresses.

The simpler explanation for *Back* effacing Charley's disability is that he does not move around much. While his fellow one-legged pursuer, Ahab, guides the Pequod, Charley's pursuit is complicated by his having to move around on land. The most obvious impact of disability upon *Back*, therefore, is a limitation of the novel's geography, which alternates between Redham, the fictional London suburb where Rose's parents live, and London, 'in which he [Charley] worked' (22). Such a nondescript London is fitting, because the London of Charley Summers is his boarding house, the office, a restaurant where he occasionally meets Arthur Middlewitch, and Nancy's flat. Although the novel begins in a graveyard and ends in a pre-nuptial bed on Christmas night, thus giving it a symbolic arc of moving from death to birth, *Back* is a novel where movement is disconnected and space poorly identified. Since Charley is never really 'back', there is no cardinal point – which for bourgeois novels is the home – from which movement derives meaning. *Back*'s formal structure, without transitional movement between chapters, highlights this: Charley usually is stuck in a place and does not move once there.

The geographic poverty caused by Charley's disability also has a visual impact upon him. The only chapter set in Charley's home begins with a fire burning, which raises the expectation that the scene will unfold in security and warmth, far away from the war: Hestia, the Greek goddess of the hearth, was the only Olympian who abstained from warring – although the militarization of the fireplace ('keep the

home fires burning’) undercuts the unity of this symbol. But the scene does not contain a single visual description other than that of the iconic fireplace, thus casting doubt on his being ‘back’, for what kind of being back is there if home is so poorly defined? Charley’s vision is self-contained: ‘He saw round and round it in his head’ (33). Undoubtedly the constant threat of air bombing makes the very notion of home precarious: both Mrs Frazier, his landlady, and Mr Grant, in the first visit to Redham, speak about the bombs that can come any time. Charley’s office cannot run at full production because its factory was blitzed. But Charley’s disconnect is even broader than this; all the other characters make certain use of their homes, whether it is Mrs Frazier thinking about the ton and a half of firewood in the other cellar or Mrs Grant using the sofa upholstery to muffle her cries. So while the scene in the bed-sit establishes Charley’s lack of a home, it more poignantly shows him severed from family life. Because interiors are like prison camp, ‘behind barbed wire’ (5-6), they are not described. In his office Charley keeps his papers ‘as a sort of talisman, on top of everything else, in the left-hand drawer of a kitchen table they’d given him for a desk’ (38). This making do with whatever is at hand is like being in the army again, which is alluded to by the talisman – many soldiers kept lucky coins or St Christopher medallions in the hope of staying alive.<sup>63</sup> Interior spaces contain sofas and chairs, beds, desks to work at and tables to eat at – in other words, interior space is designed to facilitate immobility. Outside, though, disability can be confronted and overcome; it is possible to ‘ma[k]e off fast’ to catch a train (22) and when getting off

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<sup>63</sup> Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 49.

follow ‘a strange girl with red hair the best part of three miles’ (22); inside, surrounded by objects, one is entirely disabled. The novel attempts to rectify this in the final scene with Charley and Nancy. There, despite the chapter’s brevity, there is an overflowing visual marker, a lamp with a pink shade beside the bed which colours Nancy’s naked bed. It is mentioned twice (208), so instead of the darkness and emptiness of interior spaces in the early part of the novel, a fuller view of his relationship to the world is given.

The other reason disability is not a trope in *Back* is that other characters refuse to see Charley’s condition: ‘Well I’d never have guessed if you hadn’t mentioned it, bless my soul I shouldn’t. Never in the world’ (10); ‘... no one would tell if they hadn’t been told’ (14). Even when they are aware, the civilians do not ask about it, not even politely; their behaviour is a mechanism for suppressing the guilt they feel in the face of soldiers’ sacrifices. Beneath their guilt, though, lies resentment: while Charley may have lost his leg, he was a soldier, while they are targeted and suffer as civilians. Mr Grant tells him, ‘Because it’s not all bad what’s happened to you. Not by a long chalk’ (19).

The novel’s refusal to talk, see, or describe Charley’s amputation finds its analogous silence in the treatment of war experience. Although there is fear of the ‘new bombs’ (the V1, pilotless and with a payload of one ton), and some bombs do go off in the novel during the August holiday Charley and Dot spend with James Phillips, the war itself is muted compared to its aftermath. The physical and social changes brought on by war are vividly described: there is the blitzed factory and the

daughter wishing her mother did not have to be evacuated; the changes in sexual practice among women and the social reorganization of society, from the six-month trials veterans received to how ‘everything’s initials these days’ (11, 19). The war itself, though, is never described. As one character in Elizabeth Bowen’s contemporaneous short story, ‘Sunday Afternoon’, tells a visitor, ‘What are your experiences?—Please tell us. But nothing dreadful: we are already feeling a little sad.’<sup>64</sup> The desire to know and at the same time to remain ignorant is also present in *Back*. Charley can never speak of his time ‘behind barbed wire’, and the other characters are similarly silent towards the war. It is not just that thinking about this time brings Charley nausea; even if he wanted to open up, the other characters would not be interested because the particular images they have assembled of what it means to be a prisoner would be shattered.

Though Charley gets used to his prosthetic leg, there will never be a time when the original is forgotten. Medically, the term often used to identify the goal in treating amputees was ‘restoration’, the idea being that prosthetic limbs could make the amputee ‘as good as new’.<sup>65</sup> Freud writes in *Civilization and Its Discontents* that through the ebullience of prosthetics ‘[m]an has become a god by means of artificial limbs’, but he goes on to note that these limbs ‘do not grow on him.’<sup>66</sup> The original flesh cannot be forgotten: every day and every night the prosthetic leg must be taken off for the stump to be washed thoroughly. Repatriation, restoration and

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<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, ‘Sunday Afternoon’, in *Ivy Gripp'd the Steps and Other Stories* (New York: Knopf, 1948), pp. 16-27 (p. 16).

<sup>65</sup> Edward Marshall, ‘Introduction’, in H.H. Thomas, *Help for Wounded Heroes: The Story of Ancient and Modern Artificial Limbs* (London: J. Miles, 1920), pp. 1-2.

<sup>66</sup> Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in *Standard Edition*, XXI, 92.

rehabilitation: these are ambiguous terms when applied to *Back*. They all signal a return, but this return can never be complete. Charley is physically repatriated but has no home; is physically new, but the prosthetic is no substitute for the original; and is rehabilitated, a member of the productive economy, but without any prospects or interests at work. The inability to fully accept an amputation is a common finding in the medical literature, a condition called ‘phantom limb pain’, when the amputated limb can still cause suffering to the individual even years after an amputation – Lord Nelson felt that his ability to feel his lost arm meant that his soul was eternal.<sup>67</sup> Although Charley is never said to have phantom limb pain, his yearning for the dead Rose is the physical manifestation of his search for integrity.

The test of Charley’s physical rehabilitation comes at the novel’s end, when he faces a naked Nancy.<sup>68</sup> When in the opening pages of *Back* we read that Charley loved Rose ‘above all at night’ (5), we are not told, but we can imagine, that these erotic imaginings involved a full-bodied Charley with Rose, ‘best of all in bed, her glorious locks abounding’ (7). His amputation did not form part of his erotic fantasizing – but at the end of the novel, it is not a fantasy which Charley confronts, but a naked body calling out. For all the people who claim to have not noticed his

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<sup>67</sup> Phantom limb was first diagnosed in the 1870s; see S. Weir Mitchell, ‘Phantom Limbs’, *Lippincott’s Magazine of Popular Literature and Science*, 8 (1871), 563-8. See also Marianne L. Simmel, ‘The Body Percept in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation’, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 8 (1967), 60-4.

<sup>68</sup> From his relationship with Mary Keene, Green may have known that sexual intercourse often spurs ‘phantom limb’ pain. There is nothing in the final section to indicate this, but that that sexual union would heighten the feeling of lack runs in line with the novel’s thematic of the individual’s utter isolation – even in this final scene, Charley is somebody Nancy has ‘taken on’, not taken in (208). See Salvatore Aglioti, Andrea Bonazzi, and Felician Cortese, ‘Phantom Lower Limb as a Perceptual Marker of Neural Plasticity in the Mature Human Brain’, *Proceedings: Biological Science*, 255.1344 (March 1994), 273-8.

amputation, with Nancy it will be on full display. The novel closes with Nancy comforting Charley while he cries; his breaking down at this moment is the self-consciousness of his physical condition. He calls out ‘Rose’ twice, and most critically, ‘not knowing he did so’ (208). But Rose is not the physical lover he too consciously thinks of (and thus doesn’t really think of at all); Charley calling out to Rose at this moment is an eruption of his own shame at the totality of his condition. The novel’s edifices concerning disability – its avoidance of the subject, the apparent forgetfulness of Charley being an amputee – are shattered the instant he ‘bawled like a child’ (208).

*Hearing the whole story, holes in the story*

Green believed that prose is not meant to be heard: ‘all reading aloud from a novel, that is to say from narrative’ was, in his view, ‘wrong’.<sup>69</sup> ‘Prose is not to be read aloud but to oneself alone at night ...’ (*PMB* 84). In a radio broadcast, Green notes, ‘This extract [from *Doting*] is offered you on the understanding that I disapprove of my work being read aloud.’<sup>70</sup> The novelist must not depend on the ease of spoken speech to get across his meaning but excite the deeper mystery of what reading means:

When infants we learn to speak by listening. Later on we learn to read by looking and listening. We then have to make a conscious act of imagination, whereby we associate the collection of symbols, that is, the collection of letters which go to make up the various words, with the spoken words we have already heard; and by the time we have learned to read we have

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<sup>69</sup> Green, ‘A Novelist to His Readers: I’, in *Surviving*, p. 136.

<sup>70</sup> Green, ‘For John Lehmann’s Programme’, in *Surviving*, p. 164.

forgotten the now unconscious act of imagination that is still required. Although this is now in the background, in the sense that we do not have to whip up our imagination any longer to be able to read, it must be the purpose of the novelist to excite this imagination anew in his readers without the crippling aid of speech.<sup>71</sup>

Spoken speech, in Green's mind, disabled the imaginative potential. His desire to make the novel mute influenced his novels in a number of ways, most notably in avoiding an 'elegance that is too easy'.<sup>72</sup>

Critics have long noted the importance of deafness to Green's writing. The largest claim links Green's dwindling fictional output to his loss of hearing, which began in the late 1930s. The war years, according to his son, did 'untold' damage to his hearing.<sup>73</sup> For Evelyn Waugh, his friend Henry was 'stone deaf'.<sup>74</sup> In an interview with John Russell, deafness was said to block his writing, for Green 'can write dialogue no longer, that memory will not help here, and that a writer's ear needs refurbishment—unceasing subjection to the human voice that, for him, has receded beyond reclaiming.'<sup>75</sup> Besides putting an end to his writing life, deafness is, in the view of some critics, a defining message of Green's fiction. He was a writer '[f]ascinated by the misheard, the unspoken, the oblique' (Stonebridge); deafness is a 'model for the misunderstandings that pervade [his] books and provide much of their fabric' (Bassoff); his novels showcase 'the extreme difficulty of communication between human beings' (Stokes); and 'mishearing is integral to the thematic and

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<sup>71</sup> Green, 'A Novelist to His Readers: I', in *Surviving*, p. 136.

<sup>72</sup> Green, 'Apologia', in *Surviving*, p. 94.

<sup>73</sup> Sebastian Yorke, Introduction to Green, *Pack My Bag*, p. vi.

<sup>74</sup> Waugh, qtd. in Treglown, *Romancing*, p. 205.

<sup>75</sup> John Russell, 'There It Is', *Kenyon Review*, 226 (Summer 1964), 433-65 (p. 449).



stylistic concerns' of Green's late novels' (Bragg).<sup>76</sup> While these pronouncements are correct, they lack precision. Many authors make use of miscommunication and misunderstanding, especially (and essentially) in comic novels. The physical reality of deafness, though, has not been considered in much depth, and its structural impact on Green's novels has been almost entirely overlooked.

Two major characters in Green's *œuvre* have difficulty hearing, Richard Roe in *Caught* and Mr Rock in *Concluding*. Neither is completely deaf, unlike John Singer, the congenital deaf-mute protagonist of Carson McCullers's *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), a literary sensation in both America and Britain during the war.<sup>77</sup> Yet Green's interest in disability was its manifestation through the world, disability as a process, not a given. Both Roe and Rock have trouble hearing, but these difficulties are inconstant. Their inability to hear is driven more by the context and whether or not they want to understand their interlocutors. Deafness for them, in other words, is not a cardinal fact but a selective, context-dependent quality. Green's writing re-enacts this hermeneutics of the hard of hearing, which is full of 'the strain of extracting significance from sounds that may be as loud as life yet out of focus.'<sup>78</sup> The reader is given the ability to sense what is lost due to deafness and what is wilfully disregarded. Green's novels require the reader to eavesdrop, intruding into private moments to make sense of individuals and their behaviour.

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<sup>76</sup> Stonebridge, 'Bombs and Roses', p. 27; Bassoff, *Toward 'Loving'*, p. 2; Stokes, *Novels of Henry Green*, p. 133; Bragg, 'The Hard-of-Hearing and the Hardly Heard', p. 102. Also see Phelps, 'The Vision of Henry Green', p. 616; Johnson, 'Henry Green's Comic Symbolism', p. 34; MacDermott, *Convergence*, pp. 145-6; and Ryf, *Henry Green*, p. 44.

<sup>77</sup> Roland Blythe, 'Introduction', in *Writing in a War: Stories, Poems, and Essays of the Second World War*, ed. by Roland Blythe, rev edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), pp. 11-22 (p. 21).

<sup>78</sup> David Wright, *Deafness* (New York: Stein and Day, 1969), pp. 6-7.

Rock in *Concluding* battles two disabilities tied to old age, poor vision and difficulty hearing: ‘Old and deaf, half blind, Mr Rock said about himself, the air raw in his throat’ (5). The first motion in the novel is Rock rising with a ‘groan’ (5), which is explained later on by his ‘old joints’ (168), so that when he faces stairs, he thinks that ‘[a]t his age it was a sort of rock climb’ (180). Poor sight, near deafness and physical immobility are not simply afflictions of old age but a barrier to adapting to the modern world. When Foster claims that Rock’s deafness is ‘a metaphor for his alienation’, the Marxian undertones of that term obscure the more necessary analysis of whether integration is salutary.<sup>79</sup> Rock’s disabilities endow his character with a moral centre to the novel, as I shall show, which in many respects is a paean to a liberal humanism that, the title presages, will soon pass away. The institutionalized, standardized world depicted in *Concluding* is one where youth have no hope of finding themselves, either because they are literally lost, like Mary or Merode, going mad because of anxiety, like Rock’s granddaughter, Elizabeth, or do not have their own voices but only a set of roles to mimic, like Sebastian Birt, the economics tutor. It is through his disabilities, paradoxically, that Rock is the source of stability implied by his name.<sup>80</sup>

Rock’s mishearing is often a source of muted comedy, what is often considered the stereotypical ‘slapstick ... buffoonery about deafness.’<sup>81</sup> Rock

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<sup>79</sup> Foster, ‘Henry Green’, p. 27.

<sup>80</sup> The Christian connotation of the name was, of course, topical owing to T.S. Eliot’s *The Rock* (1934), but Green may have intended some irony in Mr Rock, who does not seek salvation in another world but just tries to live through this one.

<sup>81</sup> Wright, *Deafness*, p. 5. For a recent view of the comedy of deafness, see David Lodge, *Deaf Sentence* (London: Harvill Secker, 2008).

routinely echoes his interlocutor but garbles the statement, so ‘spoiled the peace and quiet’ becomes ‘[p]ooled the diet’ (20); ‘you mean the weather’ becomes ‘end of her tether’ (34); and ‘how kind’ becomes ‘how blind’ (171). But Rock’s mishearing is more than simply comic, for it points to the inner movement of his mind: his difficulty in hearing is largely driven by his unwillingness to listen. Miss Edge observes, in a statement that very well could be taken for a larger authorial message about the cross-purposes that so many of Green’s characters find themselves in, ‘You must realize all he misunderstands is just what he does not wish to hear’ (175). Rock’s mishearing takes on a significant dimension when one considers that the first noise everyone fails to hear is the cries from the lost girls – neither Rock nor Adams, the woodman, can make out them out (7), nor can Baker and Edge, the school masters (14). The refusal to hear these cries is the long echo throughout the novel of the school’s inhumanity: not only do they insist that the dance proceed, Baker and Edge refuse to tell the police what has happened out of fear of having to be accountable. If deafness for the ancient Greeks meant ‘separation from the political and intellectual arena’, the inability to engage in the debates of the *polis* and a presumed failure of citizenship because the deaf have no capacity of reasoned reflection, then Rock’s dissociation from the public life of the Institute is assured by his disability.<sup>82</sup>

The echoing cries of lost children which none of the characters in *Concluding* hear are an echo of *Caught*’s plot, which begins with Richard Roe obsessively

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<sup>82</sup> Martha L. Edwards, ‘Deaf and Dumb in Ancient Greece’, in *Disability Studies Reader*, op. cit., pp. 29-51 (p. 35).

ruminating over the abduction of his son, Christopher. The post-war *Concluding* may ultimately be about the deafness of the overbearing State to the polyphony of diverse voices, with reports and forms replacing dialogue and names denuded of their variety. *Caught*, though, is positioned within a world of indiscriminate, overwhelming noise, where the blackout, like in the theatre, makes one attentive to noises from off-stage. Lois Bragg's argument that deafness in *Caught* serves 'no narrative effect' turns out, on closer inspection, to be mistaken when one considers the importance of hearing during wartime.<sup>83</sup>

Noise is the strongest signal of danger, and the human animal unable to hear risks being trapped. The dominant sensation of being blitzed was listening to the noises, James Gordon recalls:

It can't go on, he thought. They'll sheer off soon. But it went on and on. The sound wove an infinite steel mesh over the sky. He discovered that his body was tensed almost into an arc, and realized that he wasn't just listening to the roar of the planes, but listening for the whistling crescendo of falling bombs.<sup>84</sup>

In *The Heat of the Day* (1949), Elizabeth Bowen described the overpowering sense of noise during an aerial attack:

Overhead, an enemy plane had been dragging, drumming slowly round in the pool of night, drawing up bursts of gunfire — nosing, pausing, turning, fascinated by the point for its intent. The barrage banged, coughed, retched; in here the lights in the mirrors rocked. Now down a shaft of anticipating silence the bomb swung whistling. With the shock of detonation, still to be heard, four walls of in here yawped in then bellied out; bottles danced on

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<sup>83</sup> Bragg, 'The Hard-of-Hearing and the Hardly Heard', p. 105.

<sup>84</sup> James Gordon, 'Fires of Ruin Glow', in *Fire and Water: An Anthology by Members of the NFS*, ed. by H.S. Ingham (London: Lindsay Drummond, 1942), pp. 147-56 (p. 148). Two of Green's stories, 'Mr Jonas' and 'A Rescue', were reprinted in this anthology.

glass; a distortion ran through the view. The detonation dulled of into the cataracting roar of a split building: direct hit, somewhere else.<sup>85</sup>

In 1938 J.B.S. Haldane presciently noted that ‘the blast is translated into a wave of sound, but a sound like that of the last trumpet which literally flattens out everything in front of it. Remember the loudest thunder-clap that you have ever heard. You would not notice it in the middle of an artillery barrage.’<sup>86</sup> While these sounds are frightening, the inability to hear them would be much worse: when the government issued ear-plugs, fewer than 10% of the population used them after a first experiment: one Londoner noted, ‘it’d be absolute torture to me not to be able to hear what is happening. I should go quite mad with fear.’<sup>87</sup> In *Ministry of Fear*, published the same year as *Caught*, the worst type of raid is a silent one: ‘They hadn’t heard the plane this time; destruction had come drifting quietly down on green silk cords: the walls suddenly caved in. They were not even aware of noise.’<sup>88</sup>

Ferguson is mistaken to argue that Roe’s difficulty of hearing can be ‘easily missed’.<sup>89</sup> In the opening scene, Roe picks up Christopher from school and takes him into town: ‘He [Roe] wanted to buy him sweets but could not hear which shop the boy said was best, Christopher was so low off the ground, and he was rather deaf’ (2). Roe’s difficulty in hearing is largely comic in this scene: his condition, when added to the shyness between father and son, means that the two walk the length of the town centre and end up entering the most ill-suited of the shops for the candy.

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<sup>85</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* (London: Vintage, 1998 [1949]), p. 96.

<sup>86</sup> J.B.S. Haldane, *ARP* (London: Chapman and Hall and Gollancz, 1938), p. 31.

<sup>87</sup> Qtd. in Tom Harrison, *Living through the Blitz* (London: Collins, 1976), p. 108.

<sup>88</sup> Graham Greene, *The Ministry of Fear: An Entertainment* (London: Heinemann, 1963 [1943]), p. 24.

<sup>89</sup> Ferguson, ‘Blind Noise and Deaf Vision’, p. 107.

Yet there is a tragic undertone here: Roe's separation from his son, already substantial because the boy has been moved from London to the safety of the country, is widened by the inability to communicate.

If anything, the novel is regaled with gossip. The government – and *Caught* is, after all, a novel about an institution, the A.F.S. – tried to silence loose lips, with an advertisement campaign asking citizens to 'JOIN BRITAIN'S SILENT COLUMN – the great body of sensible men and women who have pledged themselves not to talk rumour and gossip and to stop others doing it'.<sup>90</sup> Passing on any rumour deemed likely to cause 'alarm and despondency' became, in 1940, a punishable offence, resulting in a £50 fine.<sup>91</sup> The endless pub scenes in the novel and the continual working and reworking of idle talk shows the failure of the government's effort, for there is no greater delight in the novel than bringing out voices.<sup>92</sup>

The need for these voices is apparent; Richard Roe tells his sister-in-law that he fully expects the bombs to be deafening: 'Everyone was agreed that it was going to be so noisy, when we did have a raid, that the only thing would be to carry paper and pencil so as to write messages' (178). The inadequacy of the written word as a substitute when confronted with the vital moment of direct experience – and thus the failure of representation which is Roe's attempt at storytelling at the novel's close –

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<sup>90</sup> Qtd. in Calder, *People's War*, p. 136.

<sup>91</sup> Norman Longmate, *How We Lived Then: A History of Everyday Life during the Second World War* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p. 95.

<sup>92</sup> Mary Panter-Downes reported in May 1940: 'People have no heart for reading, either, unless it's the papers, which as yet have contained only one list of casualties—possibly incurred in the Norwegian campaign. Since they can't settle down to read a book or sit through a movie, they have to talk.' See her 'Letter from London' (24 May 1940), in *New Yorker Book of War Pieces*, p. 31.

is highlighted here. The muteness brought on by the fires – ‘No one said a word,’ Roe recalls – is further evidence (180).

This has led a number of critics to argue that *Caught* offers up the view that representation is bound to fail, that ‘narration is simply inadequate.’<sup>93</sup> These simple constructs fail to do justice to Green’s narrative. Just like the epilogue to *War and Peace* which admits to the impossibility of ordering a battle into a comprehensible whole, the Blitz cannot be reduced to a singular vision or expressed through a singular voice. Roe’s stuttering efforts to relate his story has gaps, mistakes and errors; but these do not make the story any less authentic or true. His storytelling, while formally linked by the interruption through narrative parentheses to his earlier efforts to imagine the abduction of Christopher, is not inadequate because it is poorly told. Rather, it expresses his desire to work through his trauma, and it is the failure to listen, on the part of his sister-in-law, that the novel most brutally exposes. Roe’s nervous condition at the novel’s close is largely due to his inability to connect events with their causes, noises with their sources, events with their beginnings, a mental problem that is a continuation of his earlier failures to process the death of his wife or the abduction of his child. The difficulty in hearing, rather than being merely a superficial aspect of *Caught*, is integral to understanding the novel’s predicament, showing that Green considered disability in its physical manifestation an appropriate way to understand the motivations of characters and the unfolding of a story.

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<sup>93</sup> Adam Piette, *Imagination at War: British Fiction and Poetry, 1939-1945* (London: Papermac, 1995), p. 70.

### Amputated Language: The Question of Style

Dismissive of the notion that consciousness is a pure Cartesian mind, abstracted from physical reality, Rémy de Gourmont argues in *Le Problème du style* (1902) that writing is an emanation from the author's physical body. This is what he says about Chateaubriand: 'It is in his phrases that he puts his heart. He is entirely within the senses; his organs are in constant communication with the exterior world: he looks, he hears, he feels, he touches; and he pours the entirety of this sensorial harvest into his style.'<sup>94</sup> Gourmont's linking of style to the senses influenced Proust, Pound and the nascent study of stylistics.<sup>95</sup> Tim Armstrong notes that Gourmont's book 'taught Pound that a poem was a bodily event and style a physiological as well as a poetic construct.'<sup>96</sup> Helen Vendler essentially uses Gourmont's vocabulary when claiming that 'in its largest sense,' style 'is understood as a material body.'<sup>97</sup>

I approach Green's style through this bodily framework. His endeavour to create an individual style has been well-noted but also robustly criticized. Stokes notes that Green differed from his contemporaries by experimenting 'with language in an endeavour to make prose the embodiment of sense-impression and emotional

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<sup>94</sup> Rémy de Gourmont, *Le Problème du style: questions d'art, de littérature et de grammaire* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1920 [1902]), p. 51.

<sup>95</sup> Charles Bally, a student of Saussure's and one of the earliest students of stylistics, as well as one of the first authors to write on free indirect style, follows Gourmont in claiming that language cannot reflect external reality because 'everything which has a repercussion on our physical being' shapes and deforms our sense of the world, and also our understanding of language. See his *Traité de stylistique française*, 5th edn, 2 vols (Genève: Librairie de l'Université, 1970), I, 6.

<sup>96</sup> Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body*, p. 90.

<sup>97</sup> Helen Vendler, *The Breaking of Style: Hopkins, Heaney, Graham* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 1.



experience.’<sup>98</sup> Bassoff argues that Green rejected ordinary prose and conspicuously attempted to erect a more conspicuous, individual style.<sup>99</sup> There is also a view that Green’s ‘highly artificial’ style, with its ‘dislocations of syntax’ and ‘tamperings with idiom’, undermines traditional language.<sup>100</sup> Philip Toynbee states that his ‘linguistic oddities’ are ‘the most important stumbling block’ to approaching his fiction.<sup>101</sup> Green’s writing is said to be ‘stylized to the point of self-consciousness,’ to use an ambiguous body-soul image.<sup>102</sup> For Mackay, he is ‘an opaque stylist’.<sup>103</sup>

This section examines Green’s style, arguing that multiplicity is its defining feature. Rather than creating a singular style, the language is adaptable and tailored for a particular moment. Green himself praised Edward Garnett, the publisher’s reader who recommended *Blindness* for publication, for his ability to cut up the words on the page: ‘He would take out a blue pencil and he would never go through more than one page. The words he struck out were magically unexpected; the result, when one had time to ponder it, was alchemy.’<sup>104</sup> In another homage to Garnett, Green called him ‘the greatest book surgeon of his day.’<sup>105</sup> The textual body, in other words, became enchanted through physical elimination, a crippling that did not weaken it but increased its expressiveness; in medicine, ‘amputation is indicated

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<sup>98</sup> Stokes, *Novels of Henry Green*, p. 187.

<sup>99</sup> Bassoff, *Toward ‘Loving’*, p. 53.

<sup>100</sup> Swinden, *English Novel of History and Society*, pp. 59, 60; John Russell, *Style in the Modern British Novel: Studies in Joyce, Lawrence, Forster, Lewis, and Green* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 161-2.

<sup>101</sup> Toynbee, ‘The Novels of Henry Green’, pp. 489, 490.

<sup>102</sup> Dillard, ‘Contemporary Prose Styles’, p. 217.

<sup>103</sup> Mackay, *Modernism and World War II*, p. 92.

<sup>104</sup> Green, ‘Edward Garnett’, in *Surviving*, p. 135.

<sup>105</sup> Green, ‘An Unfinished Novel’, in *Surviving*, p. 257.

when an extremity or part of an extremity is useless or harmful to life.’<sup>106</sup> When Ezra Pound, for example, heeded Ford Madox Ford’s advice to eliminate superfluous words, he cut thirty lines from ‘In a Station of the Metro’ to end up with a fourteen-word poem; in turn, Pound put Eliot’s *The Waste Land* ‘three times through the sieve’.<sup>107</sup>

If style is a material body, most modernist authors sought to individualize it. Ever since Flaubert, who was ‘obsessed by the work of style’, prose writers wishing to be considered artists have felt the need for their style to be as personal as a signature.<sup>108</sup> ‘Every writer,’ Proust notes, ‘is obliged to make his own language.’<sup>109</sup> In *The Problem of Style* (1922), John Middleton Murry claims that a ‘great writer’ fuses ‘the personal and the universal’ through the creation of an individual style, giving the example of Doughty’s ‘masterpiece of prose.’<sup>110</sup> Marjorie Boulton argues that ‘[a] highly individual writer ... will have a highly individual idiom.’<sup>111</sup> This need for an individual style was tied to the growing debasement of language. Murry views great literature as ‘a victory over language’ because it provides vitality to what is ‘perpetually on the verge of exhaustion’.<sup>112</sup> The sense of language moving towards

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<sup>106</sup> Thomas G. Orr, *Modern Methods of Amputation* (St. Louis: C.V. Mosby, 1926), p. 17.

<sup>107</sup> Ford Madox Huefer [Ford], *The Critical Attitude* (London: Duckworth, 1911), p. 138; T.S. Eliot to Scofield Thayer, 20 January 1922, in *The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Valerie Eliot, vol. 1 [1898-1922] (London: Faber, 1988), p. 502.

<sup>108</sup> Antoine Compagnon, *Literature, Theory, and Common Sense*, trans. by Carol Cosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 127.

<sup>109</sup> Marcel Proust to Mme Émile Straus, January 1908, in *Correspondance générale de Marcel Proust*, ed. by Robert Proust and Paul Brach, 6 vols (Paris: Plon, 1930-1936), VI, 92-4.

<sup>110</sup> J. Middleton Murry, *The Problem of Style* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960 [1922]), pp. 7, 15.

<sup>111</sup> Marjorie Boulton, *The Anatomy of Prose* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), p. 24.

<sup>112</sup> Murry, *The Problem of Style*, p. 85.

cliché and jargon was linked to modernity's propaganda, advertising and mass communication, Stuart Chase observed:

Power Age communities have grown far beyond the check of individual experience. They rely increasingly on printed matter, radio, communication at a distance. This has operated to enlarge the field for words, absolutely and relatively, and has created a paradise for fakirs. A community of semantic illiterates, of persons unable to perceive the meaning of what they read and hear, is one of perilous equilibrium. Advertisers, as well as demagogues thrive on this illiteracy.<sup>113</sup>

A common style, in other words, could no longer provide meaning for the consciously literary artist, so disabling language was not a sign of eccentricity but the first effort in salvaging it. Eugene Jolas's manifesto in the summer 1929 issue of *transition*, which was written with Pound's help, was unequivocal on this point:

The literary creator has the right to disintegrate the primal matter of words imposed on him by text-books and dictionaries ... to use words of his own fashioning and to disregard existing grammatical and syntactical laws ... The writer expresses. He does not communicate.<sup>114</sup>

The modernists, Hugh Kenner details, attempted to reinvent language, embarking on what he called a 'Romantic quest for purity'.<sup>115</sup>

*Pack My Bag* clearly shows Green's devotion to style. If the remoteness of the author in this self-portrait makes this 'book look blind' (84), there is an attempt 'to explain objectively and well' (161) one particular thing: 'My task is to show ... how the style, which changed as a girl's complexion changes with the hours she keeps, emerged into 1928, the date beyond which I do not hope to go; how this self-expression grew and how it altered' (162). Such a goal in an autobiography is an

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<sup>113</sup> Stuart Chase, *The Tyranny of Words*, 6th edn (London: Methuen, 1947 [1938]), pp. 17-8.

<sup>114</sup> Eugene Jolas, 'Proclamation', *transition*, 16-17 (June 1929), p. 13.

<sup>115</sup> Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 109.

almost literal acceptance of Buffon's aphorism 'le style, c'est l'homme même.' And so it is, as Green himself put it, 'A man's style is like the clothes he wears, an expression of his personality.'<sup>116</sup>

This phrase comes just after *Pack My Bag*'s publication, in 'Apologia', Green's first published piece of criticism and his longest sustained meditation on style.<sup>117</sup> Published in *Folios of New Writing*, a review run by John Lehmann, it examines C.M. Doughty, 'this monumentally lonely man' whose words 'express their meaning in our bones.'<sup>118</sup> The praise Green lavishes upon Doughty seems to be equally true of his own writing:

His style is mannered but he is too great a man to be hidden beneath it. It does not seem possible that future generations will be able to date one of his paragraphs, he seems so alone. His style is constant throughout, seems to be habitual, but, on analysis of this last, is found to vary with his subject. He is often obscure. He is always magnificent.<sup>119</sup>

The essay ends by considering Doughty's relevance to writers in wartime London, who had yet to 'learn to write in the idiom of the time' but whose works would be irrelevant if they did not seize the opportunity to do so:

A question is asked us by his work. Now that we are at war, is not the advantage for writers, and for those who read them, that they will be forced, by the need they have to fight, to go out into territories, it may well be at home, which they would never otherwise have visited, and that they will be forced, by way of their own selves, towards a style which, by the impact of a life strange to them and by their honest acceptance of this, will be pure as Doughty's was, so that they will reach each one his own style that shall be his monument?<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Green, 'Apologia', in *Surviving*, p. 92.

<sup>117</sup> Its title clearly connects it to *Pack My Bag*, whose emotional underpinning is provided by guilt and 'shame remembered' (149).

<sup>118</sup> Green, 'Apologia', in *Surviving*, pp. 92, 93.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97, 96.

The ‘monumentally lonely man’ has built ‘his monument’ through style: Green cannot make any clearer the necessity of the writer developing a personal style, one that is strongly attuned to his personality but also to the variety of experiences the modern world presents to the author, who must seek them out and engage with them in the creation of this edifice which, for readers, is an entryway into the author’s mind.

Yet before Green speaks of the ‘monument’ that is Doughty’s style, he uses a different term to approach it: ‘what,’ he wonders, ‘founded the style, the great edifice of prose which is his mausoleum?’ Style becomes rarefied, entombed, an end in itself, like the mausoleum which exists only to serve as a reminder of the holiness of the gods but which, through physical enclosure, denies their omnipresence. Style, in other words, while creating the author’s claims to holiness, a term related to its near-homonym, wholeness, also creates division, a mummified death whose likeness to life may be startling but always inadequate. A similar view animates Green’s view of representation, delivered from ‘in a sort of tomb’ (the B.B.C. radio broadcast, itself a holy site for the English language but also a place where many felt it was deadened), where Green says that the novelist must ‘create a life which is not’.<sup>121</sup> This aspect of Green’s thinking about style has not been considered by critics, who are otherwise content to focus their critical inquiries on Green the self-styled modernist for whom style was supreme. Largely depending on their evaluation of the success of this endeavour, Green is either praised for his innovation and originality or criticised for

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<sup>121</sup> Green, ‘A Novelist to His Readers: I’, in *Surviving*, p. 136.

his artificiality and mannerism. Yet ‘Apologia’ ends with a call for writers to develop not just an individual style but a style chosen for its’ appropriateness to the times: style must not just express an individual particularity but must always be subservient to the meaning that it must communicate, the ‘communion’ that writing must try to effect between author and reader. This changes the *enjeu* of a study of Green’s style. The critic, rather than engaging in an exercise in quantitative analysis of word order, sentence length or syntax – all activities that treat language in isolation – must look instead to how Green’s use of language is tied to the context in which he is writing.

This necessarily implies abandoning the notion that there is a singular style in which Green operates, that a ‘Greenian’ language can be identified. The Georgian prose of *Blindness* is wilfully destroyed in *Living*, while moments of overflowing lyricism punctuate *Party Going* and *Loving*, only for there be a marked austerity in the later novels. Language itself, even when used in dialogue, is always pushed towards multivocality:

‘What’s he at now?’ Mr Middleton asked.

‘An anthology of love poetry he’s to call “Doting”. Don’t you agree it’s a marvellous title?’

‘Well, you know, doting, to me, is not loving.’

‘I don’t follow,’ she said with a small frown.

‘To my mind love must include adoration of course, but if you just dote on a girl you don’t necessary go so far as to love her. Loving goes deeper.’

‘Well,’ she suggested, ‘perhaps the same words could mean different things to men and women.’

‘Possibly,’ he said. ‘Perhaps not.’ (*Doting*, 203)

The dialogue is not only of obvious importance as an engaged discussion of what doting means but also has a wider meaning to Green's fiction by contrasting *Doting* to *Loving*. It also reflects back to the novel's first use of the word 'doting', when Annabel says to Arthur Middleton, 'Let's talk of doting' (190) – the ensuing dialogue, it is now clear, lacked a clear centre, for her understanding of the term is different from his. The lack of a singular meaning to words was later explicated by Green:

In the examples I have given there are words to cover almost any shade of acquiescence or even bad temper, or both, or again of moods between the two. For there are reasons why we should use combinations of words with the widest possible range of meaning in dialogue. That is, dialogue should not be capable of only *one meaning*, or mood ....<sup>122</sup>

If this is how language operates in reality, that is, if when it is used between people trying to communicate this confusion is inevitable, Green's style transfers this to the narrative too. Because language cannot have a direct, single meaning, Green's style must be flexible to accommodate a variety of positions and meanings.

While critics have identified certain elements common to Green's novels (short sentences, some particular verbal constructions), these by themselves do not form a style, much less account for its effects. A long sentence, like:

She dropped her eyes and in so doing she deepened her forehead on which once each month a hundred miles away in Dublin her white hair was washed in blue and waved and curled (*Loving*, 23)

is much more easily read than:

Bridesley, Birmingham. (*Living*, 207)

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<sup>122</sup> Green, 'A Novelist to His Readers: I', in *Surviving*, p. 138.

The thirty-four word sentence of *Living* scans easily, partly because of its lack of punctuation and paratactic ending but also because it expresses a trivial fact about a trivial character (Mrs Tennant). The two-word opening to *Living* is a heavy ballast: the verb must be supplied (through phrases like ‘This here is’ or ‘This story is set in’); it obligates the reader to draw out ‘the associations common to place names’ (*PMB*, 84), which for Green was a fault of naming and one of the reasons he tried to avoid it; and because it centres the story in a particular locale, it echoes across the novel, thus living on long after it is read.

While there may be no singular Greenian style, features of his writing do appear to be unusual or irregular. The amputation of language, where the definite article is cut out almost entirely and the elision of the adverbial ‘-ly’ ending, is not common to all of Green’s novels, but it does stand out for its abrasiveness. It also seems indicative, Philip Toynbee observed, of a larger approach to language, ‘an aversion to the *looseness* of modern English prose.’<sup>123</sup> The desire for intensified expression and meaning is surely one aspect, and perhaps the most important one, of Green’s writing, but it does not qualify as style itself. Toynbee’s phrase, though, is a useful description of Green’s *dégraissage* of shapeless prose.

The elimination of the definite article in *Living* has been considered by a number of critics to be emblematic of Green’s style, but no consensus has emerged on what motivated this choice or its effects. A heady experimentation – a new way of life and a new way of writing – was the backdrop to *Living*. A number of critics

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<sup>123</sup> Toynbee, ‘Novels of Henry Green’, p. 492.



think that the experiment went too far, that the language of the novel is affected and artificial. Toynbee was a harsh critic:

We feel at once that an effect is being striven for, and, by the inevitable action of readers' resistance, we determine that the effect shall not be achieved. ...in this case the eccentricities seem somehow trivial. This omission of the definite article irritates us by its self-consciousness, and seems to contribute nothing to the perfectly ordinary statements which are being made.<sup>124</sup>

Giorgio Melchiori calls this omission of the definite article an 'arresting mannerism'; he finds it 'tiresome, and at times it seems to be done by mere mechanical revision, with resulting superficiality'.<sup>125</sup> Stokes thinks that the 'the almost total warfare declared on the definite article' is baffling since 'it seems to be impossible to discover any principle by which their fate is decided'.<sup>126</sup> After reviewing several of the existing theories behind Green's stylistic choice, I shall argue that the amputation of the definitive article is not a random excision of an otherwise useful word; rather, it serves a particular end, namely to highlight questions of possession and closeness.

One plausible explanation is offered by Valentine Cunningham, who has related how deictics were used in the period by writers like Auden, Eliot, Lawrence and Dylan Thomas 'to assert authority, knowledge, command of experience'.<sup>127</sup> Green's decision to cut the definite article could thus be attributed to his being an outsider to the factory, working-class life and Birmingham. But this by itself does not fully explain Green's choice, for while he was well aware of the class

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<sup>124</sup> Toynbee, 'Novels of Henry Green', p. 491.

<sup>125</sup> Melchiori, *Tightrope Walkers*, pp. 191-2.

<sup>126</sup> Stokes, *Novels of Henry Green*, p. 196.

<sup>127</sup> Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties*, p. 10.

implications of writing as an outsider, as I have argued, he did not fully abdicate all narrative authority in the novel.

While some critics have argued that the article is omitted in a nod to capture the particularities of working-class speech, this argument fails when considering that sometimes the definite article is used even when its omission would be more natural:

‘But us workin’ people, we got to work for our living, yes we have,’ she cried out in mind, quoting Mr Jones, ‘and go out to find the work.’ (328)

When free indirect style is used, articles are differentiated, not blankly excluded: ‘But Craigan told him to go and fetching down the jug from dresser he stood by mantelpiece’ (218). This jug will be used to get the beer, so it has a definite function in mind that calls for specification for Craigan, whereas ‘dresser’ and ‘mantelpiece’ are, at that moment, functionless. This final example shows the narrative going in and out of free indirect speech, with the use of articles changing accordingly:

*When Lily got to station, bag in hand, she was so tired with strain of walking through streets seeing in each man or woman she passed someone who would ask her where she was going off to with a bag on Sunday morning, and at the first, leaving home like she had – all those lies and the way she crept downstairs had so tired her that she could hardly see who were standing on the platform. Whether were any there she knew. She said in mind she was in such a state now she did not mind if there was someone who’d see her. She put bag down and there, when she looked up again, was Mr Jones. In his hand was bouquet of tulips. (344, emphasis mine).*

The italicized portions are free indirect style for Lily while the underlined phrase is free indirect speech for Bert Jones, who is proud of those flowers and his romantic gesture. The difference in article use here is telling: ‘bag in hand’ and ‘put bag down’ are contained within her mind and speech, while ‘with a bag on Sunday morning’ is an external perspective of spectators brought about by the narrator’s

voice. There is no need to state ‘the station’ because for Lily it is clear which station she is thinking of.

The interplay between article use, free indirect style, and questions of possession and specificity can be further explicated through this example: ‘Soon after Lily Gates came quickly out of house and went quickly up the street’ (219). The choice to omit the article before ‘house’ but not before ‘street’ requires explanation. Standard linguistic theory on the definite article uses Russell’s understanding of uniqueness: ‘The only thing that distinguishes “the so-and-so” from “a so-and-so” is the implication of uniqueness.’<sup>128</sup> Modernist writers, according to G. Rostrevor Hamilton, favoured the definite article because it ‘points to one unique object’; their ‘predilection for the particular image’ led them to desire concretization through the definite article (Auden is the common example).<sup>129</sup> My argument here, though, is that Green’s omission of the definite article leads to an even stronger case of possession and concreteness.

Analysing articles in isolation is, according to Harald Weinrich, problematic.<sup>130</sup> The use of the definite article largely depends on the specific information context between speaker and hearer:

(1) *I went to a store yesterday*

(2) *I went to the store yesterday*

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<sup>128</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1919), p. 176.

<sup>129</sup> G. Rostrevor Hamilton, *The Tell-Tale Article: A Critical Approach to Modern Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), pp. 14, 34.

<sup>130</sup> Harald Weinrich, ‘The Textual Function of the French Article’, in *Literary Style: A Symposium*, ed. by Seymour Chatman (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 221-40 (p. 223).

In (1) the hearer must ask ‘which?’; in (2), both speaker and hearer have knowledge of the specific store referred to. Now consider a modification that approximates Lily’s usage:

(3) *I went to store yesterday*

The ‘store’ in question is even more precisely formulated than in (2) because there is only one possible ‘store’ this can refer to, whereas in (2) ‘the store’ requires differentiating the particular store to other stores in existence. But (3) is certainly an unnatural formulation, and this is because it is a statement with no hearer function: it is a private sentence, spoken to oneself. The speaker has no need to linguistically modify the store, which is after all the function of the article, because there is no need to communicate the thought to anyone else. In the sentence from *Living*, in other words, ‘house’ for Lily does not need further precision because for Lily there is only one possible house, one that she possesses and is hers. The alternative available to her falls short of this concrete possession: ‘the house’ is one house out of many while ‘a house’ is a generic classification. The contrast of this to ‘the street’ in the sentence makes this clear: ‘the street’ is a specification of geography but not to the point she can possess it or that it can be exclusive to her. The lack of geographic specification in *Living*, furthermore, undercuts the specificity assigned to a particular street because the reader does not have any way of knowing which street this is or where, in fact, these streets of Bridesley are. It is one particular street out of many similar ones: ‘What is town then, how do I know? ... Houses made the streets, people

made the houses' (355). This is Lily in Liverpool, where both strangeness and ignorance force her to dissociate herself from what she sees.

While in the case of Lily's house the omission of the definite article emphasizes possession, its omission in other cases creates fluidity: 'Sparrows flew by belts that ran from lathes on floor up to shafting above by skylights' (208). If articles were used in a 'proper' manner, the sentence would read: 'Sparrows flew by the belts that ran from the lathes on the floor up to the shafting above by the skylights.' (208). Four extra words would be needed, and the effect would be to tie down the location of these objects, yet in the factory, it is the fluidity of movement that contributes to the men's skill in labour (Dick Dupret in this scene is appreciating the movement of the labourers) but also creates possible danger to the workers (the falling crane).

The scene, which begins after the workers' story concludes with an injunction against 'always nosing into other people's doings', is Dick Dupret's first view inside the factory (208). After he and the works manager 'went through engineer's shop', this transpires:

*Works manager* and Mr Dupret's son went through *sliding doors* and *works manager* said this was the iron foundry. Black sand made the floor. Men knelt in it. *Young man* passed by Mr Dupret and *works manager*.

'What a beautiful face.'

'What? Eh? Well I don't know. He works for that moulder over in the corner. He's getting an old man now but there's no one can beat him for his work. The best moulder in Birmingham Mr Dupret. And he's a worry. That's his labourer there by him now. ... He won't work with no one else Mr Dupret and he's the best moulder in Birmingham. ...'

*Foreman* came up and *works manager* asked him about *stamping frames* he would be casting that evening and they talked and Mr Dupret looked at the foundry. He walked over nearer to where Craigan worked.

This man scooped gently at *great shape* cut down in black sand *in great iron box*. He was grimed with the black sand. (208-9, emphasis mine)

The variation in article use, marked by italics for omission and underlining when the definite article appears, follows a series of general rules which confirm the preceding analysis. Individuals in motion, like ‘works manager’ or ‘foreman’, do not receive a definite article. Although there is tension with the factory and jockeying for power within its ranks, to refer to ‘the works manager’ or ‘the foreman’ would both inflate their self-importance in the eyes of others and would also make them a particular one of many because the definite article usually implies a subdivision.<sup>131</sup> The mention of Craigan as ‘the best moulder in Birmingham’ shows this: the article is used because there is a comparison being made among a larger set of moulders. The geographic sites which receive the definite article – the iron foundry, the corner, the foundry – are contrasted to the earlier mention of going ‘through engineer’s shop’. Note that ‘the iron foundry’ and ‘the corner’ involves the works manager stating this to Dick Dupret: a class element is involved because he inflates his speech when speaking to the young scion. This class bias is apparent when considering that Dick Dupret ‘looked at the foundry’; the definite article imposes a separation and externalization. When they walked ‘through engineer’s shop’, the definite article is not used because Dick Dupret is not aware of what this space is since the works manager leads him through the factory. When Craigan ‘scooped at great shape’, the language internalizes his motion, whereas his being ‘grimed with the black sand’ is Dick Dupret’s viewpoint.

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<sup>131</sup> Dwight Bolinger, ‘A Postscript to Poston the Article’, *Modern Language Journal*, 59 (April 1975), 181-5 (p. 181).

All of this is to show that Green's use of articles in *Living* is not arbitrary but contains within it a particular logic. By particularizing his usage of articles, Green draws attention to the language and the ways in which it both connects and dissociates individuals. I argued in Chapter 2 that the use of dialect in *Living* is not straightforward but a highly complex strategy to both mark out class differences but also to allow for individual identity within a larger community. The use of articles in *Living* also has class implications: in this novel about labour, the articles or their omission implicate the status of claims of possession and personal property. Green's variation also makes the reading a kind of labour, which in itself is a kind of class commentary. Evelyn Waugh was right to speak of Green's 'proletarian grammar' – although he meant it as a criticism, the syntax in *Living* is attuned to its context.<sup>132</sup> Readers who consider Green's cutting away or amputation of articles to be a grammatical error put them back in when reading. This operation is deeply problematic: it sanitizes language which does not accord with preconceived notions of what is proper. Recent studies in linguistics have shown that article use rarely reflects grammatical or syntactical probity but rather depends mostly on context.<sup>133</sup> Considered in this light, the amputation of Green's language in *Living*, is not expressive of something unhealthy or lacking in wholeness but is a means by which individuals can express themselves more fully.

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<sup>132</sup> Evelyn Waugh to Henry Yorke, 13 November 1940, in *Letters EW*, p. 144.

<sup>133</sup> See John A. Hawkins, 'On (In)definite Articles: Implicatures and (Un)grammaticality Prediction', *Journal of Linguistics*, 27 (1991), 405-442 (pp. 408-9).

### Sensing the Whole: Coming Together and Concluding

One of the most famous lines in the history of literary modernism is W.B. Yeats's 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot stand'. It was written after the conclusion of the Great War but with revolutions in mind (Ireland, Russia, Germany) and couched within a poem, 'The Second Coming', which refuses to provide a millenarian return for Christ. And it was published in *The Dial*, one of those 'little reviews' so central to the creation and definition of modernist aesthetics. Yeats's line also helps put in perspective Green's own position with regard to disability, ideas of which are ultimately, as I have argued, derived from a rhetoric of wholeness. Disability, in other words, cannot be isolated but must be considered within a larger framework of wholeness. The senses work together, in 'consensus,' (objects are heard, seen, felt, smelt, all at once, not in isolated operations); John Bulwer, a seventeenth-century natural philosopher, called this the '*community among the Senses*.'<sup>134</sup> If literary form is 'the successful combining of all parts into an artful whole', then the question of providing a centre to the novel and endowing it with unity and wholeness is even more pressing for novels whose characters are defined by a radical disability.<sup>135</sup> Joan Entwhistle's father in *Blindness* dreams of writing 'the great book that was to link everything into a circle' (413), but his patent failure to do so may be implicitly read as Green's own view on the possibility of unity and wholeness for the novel. Frank

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<sup>134</sup> Oliver Sacks, *Seeing Voices: A Journey into the World of the Deaf* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 6 (note); John Bulwer, *Philocophus, or, The deafe and dumbe mans friend ...* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1648), pp. A5, 64.

<sup>135</sup> Ray Benedict West and Robert Stallmann, *The Art of Modern Fiction* (New York: Rinehart, 1949), p. 647.



Kermode, in his work on closure, notes that life, which begins *in medias res*, and which ends *in mediis rebus*, needs artistic unity ‘to make sense’ of this span through ‘fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and poems.’<sup>136</sup> The search for wholeness within Green’s fiction consists of two factors: sites of communion (banquets, meals and public events), where characters attempt to transcend their separation and to meld together into a whole, and the problem of closure, whereby the novel is formally endowed with a centre and is itself an artistic whole.

*Coming together, ending apart*

If Green’s characters often seem to be isolated, imprisoned in a consciousness that makes intimacy impossible and communication nothing more than misunderstanding – ‘they left without arranging to meet again’ (*Doting*, 193) – there is nonetheless a push within his novels for events that transcend atomization. It is surprising that few critics have noted Green’s use of ensemble scenes to structure his novels: the football match in *Living*, the hunt in *Pack My Bag*, the servants’ dinner in *Loving*, the founder’s dance in *Concluding*, and the twenty-firster for Philip Weatherby in *Nothing*. In these events, characters seek communion in each other, going beyond their individuality and into a community of togetherness. They are trying to reclaim what, in the eyes of critics like F.R. Leavis, had been insuperably lost.<sup>137</sup> Yet, like

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<sup>136</sup> Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 7.

<sup>137</sup> ‘The organic community has virtually disappeared, and with it the only basis for a genuine national culture; so nearly disappeared that when one speaks of the old popular culture that existed in

everything in Green, there is a vicious undercurrent to this communal longing that ultimately prevents any unity.

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*Living's* desire to create a portrait of a community is evidenced in the famous opening, 'Bridesley, Birmingham.' While the factory is often a site of division, of petty warfare between managers and employees, with the employees themselves divided by personal hates, the novel's penultimate scene is an attempt to bring the community together: Aaron Connolly and Mr Gates, who had before been divided because of a workplace accident, cheer on Aston Villa together. Whereas the novel began with 'thousands' on the streets but only '[s]ome' turning into the Dupret factory (207), when Gates and Connolly go the match 'more and more came out from other roads into street they were walking down to the Villa ground' (379). While the factory is the site of raw production, the sky on match day was 'dark, so it dully shone like iron, this time, when it has been machined' (379). Even their attendance at the match seems providential, with Craigan giving Gates money to go, thus providing a small measure of reconciliation within the household.

In 1927, Green had written a story, 'Test Trial at Lords', which mirrors the penultimate scene of *Living*.<sup>138</sup> In the unpublished story, the cricket supporters are described by a lonely narrator who tracks their individual motion, appropriate enough given the cooler passions of cricket. In *Living* the working class crowd, felt by many to come to football games 'in their workaday dirt, and with their workaday

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innumerable local variations people cannot grasp what one means.' F.R. Leavis, 'A Serious Artist', *Scrutiny*, 1.2 (September 1932), 173-9 (pp. 177-8).

<sup>138</sup> It was never published in Green's lifetime but is printed in *Surviving*, pp. 48-50.

adjectives very loose on their tongues', has a communal voice.<sup>139</sup> The naming of the players, the printing of football specials like 'Villa News' (380) and the songs from the mounds show the community building up its self-identity through support of its team.

Cheering on the local football team allows for the community's song to erase, for one small moment, the mechanical factory sirens. Because football audiences in the First Division in the late 1920s easily surpassed 25,000, these songs were loud.<sup>140</sup> And they don't die out: like the change to the present tense which highlights the importance to the novel of Bert's running away from Lily, the scene at Villa Park is also in the present tense:

The band packs up, it moves off, then over at further corner the whole vast crowd that begins roaring, the Villa team comes out, then everyone is shouting. On face of the two mounds great swaying, like corn before wind, is made down towards the ground, frantic excitement. Gates wailed and sobbed for now his voice had left him. The Villa, the Villa, come on the Villa. (380)

Mr Gates's voice has 'left him' but the communal voice has taken over, and Aaron Connolly is moved to quasi-religious ecstasy as he stands 'transfixed with passion' before these 'eleven men who play the best football in the world' (380).

Yet division persists in this moment of the community celebrating itself. The community in this scene is not so much cheering on Aston Villa but itself: the players 'took no notice of the crowd, no notice' (380). The other great leisure activity within the novel, cinema-going, is described in similar terms by Lily, who

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<sup>139</sup> Charles Edwardes, 'The New Football Mania', *The Nineteenth Century*, 32.188 (October 1892), 622-631 (p. 627).

<sup>140</sup> Nicholas Fishwick, *English Football and Society, 1910-1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 49.

perceives on the screen only actors pretending to act, with the spectators convincing themselves to be spectators. In the darkness of the cinema another kind of community is formed:

A great number were in cinema, many standing, battalions were in cinema over all the country, young Mr Dupret was in a cinema, over above up into the sky their feeling panted up supported by each other's feeling, away away, Europe and America, mass on mass their feeling united supporting, renewed their sky. (244-5)

But the community formed is under the cloak of darkness, and thus cannot form a coherent public identity. And while the cinema bridges class differences, the novel's more salient image of the possibility of class comprehension is the image of Dick Dupret walking the streets of Bridesley and passing by Lily, noticing nothing.

The football match, though, takes place in the open air and in a moment of leisure as the community renews itself. Clubs incarnate the community's vision of itself: Aston Villa was identified with a quick and electric style of play, suiting Birmingham's industrial speed.<sup>141</sup> Villa Park is not merely a playing pitch around which men in worker's clothes have paid 1s – about the price of a packet of cigarettes – to watch but a 'sacred place' where bonds are formed: 'the teams' colours in rosettes', the deep silence of the men before entering the stadium, and Mr Connolly 'stood like transfixed with passion' all allude to the sacral character of the team (380).<sup>142</sup> Inside nothing can break the community apart so long as it supports

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<sup>141</sup> Christian Bromberger, *Football: La bagatelle le plus sérieuse du monde* (Paris: Bayard Éditions, 1998), pp. 72-3.

<sup>142</sup> John Bale, 'Playing at Home: British Football and a Sense of Place', in *British Football and Social Change: Getting into Europe*, ed. by John Williams and Stephen Wagg (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991), pp. 130-144 (p. 131).

the Villa – differences in class, education, and manners are meaningless for ninety minutes.<sup>143</sup>

But this escape from the divisions within a community elides the paradox that the local team was not very local at all. The game’s professionalization had changed its ethos, as J.B. Priestley bemoaned:

Nearly everything possible has been done to spoil this game: the heavy financial interests; the absurd transfer and player-selling system; the lack of any birth or residential qualification for the players; the betting and coupon competitions; the absurd publicity given to every feature of it by the Press; the monstrous partisanship of the crowds ....<sup>144</sup>

While the supporters of “The Villa” are from Birmingham, the players are not. Once professionalization took over football in the late 1880s, spurred on by clubs like Aston Villa, players were recruited from far and wide, with most clubs having developed extensive scouting networks (especially in Scotland). Billy Walker, the club’s legendary striker, was from Staffordshire; the goal-keeper, Ben Olney, was from London; Billy Cook, the team’s best player from 1927 to 1929, with 35 goals in 57 games, was from County Durham. One member of the 1928-29 Villa team, it is true, was from Bordesley Green – *Living’s* ‘Bridesley – ‘Nobby’ Capewell. Joe Tate, a much-loved Villa player at the time, had played at Round Oak Steel Works FC, in

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<sup>143</sup> In their study of Muncie, the Lynds noted: ‘Today more civic loyalty centers around basketball than around any other one thing. No distinctions divide the crowds which pack the school gymnasium for home games ... North Side and South Side, Catholic and Kluxer, banker and machinist—their one shout is “eat ’em, beat ’em Bearcats”.’ See Helen and Robert Lynd, *Middletown* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1929), p. 485.

<sup>144</sup> Priestley, *English Journey*, p. 113. This did not, though, undermine football’s appeal: ‘It is easy to understand, though some austere persons elaborately refuse to understand, why these crowds in the industrial towns pay shillings they can badly afford to see twenty-two professionals kick a ball about. They are not mere spectators in the sense of being idle and indifferent lookers-on; though only vicariously, yet they run and leap and struggle and sweat, are driven into despair, are raised to triumph; and there is thrust into their lives of monotonous tasks and grey streets an epic hour of colour and strife that is no more a mere matter of other men’s boots and a leather ball than a violin concerto is a mere matter of some other man’s catgut and rosin’ (113).

Sandwell, which borders upon Birmingham. Tate's engagement with a factory team was becoming increasingly rare, with professional clubs recruiting the best players straight out of school. And factory teams were undermined by professionalization: in Birmingham in the 1870s, when the game was largely amateur, there were at least twenty-five works teams.<sup>145</sup> In some sense, Aaron Connolly and Mr Gates are paying to see a group of strangers whose success – whose greater economic value – eliminated the closer physical bonds of the communal works team. The money that is being made off the Villa – the approach to the stadium is peppered with men 'selling the Villa News', others who 'sell the teams' colours in rosettes' and '[h]awkers selling sweets' (380) – undermines the innocence of community since what is being put on display here is a product of capitalism. It is noticeable that the match barely gets underway before the narrative stops, with the final words devoted to the match whose players 'took no notice of the crowd, no notice' (380). The section does not formally end here but continues for another paragraph, with Craigan lying in bed. The communal impulse gives way to a scene of gripping isolation:

Mr Craigan lay in bed in his house. He thought in mind. He thought in mind how he had gone to work when he was eight. He had worked on till no one would give him work. He thought what had he got out of fifty-seven years' work? Nothing. He thought of Lily. He thought what was there now for him? Nothing, nothing. He lay. (380)

The footballers' negation of the crowd, of the community that is meant to support it, is mirrored in Craigan's own sense of being abandoned and of displacement.

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<sup>145</sup> Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980), p. 28.

The grand moment of humour in *Loving* comes in the servants' dinner at the end, which in some ways is the conclusion of the great comic meal at the middle of the novel (92-98). The scene is prefaced by Mrs Tennant's increasingly maniacal obsession with 'the servants simply eating their heads off' (165); their 'huge meals', she knows, are not taken in 'utter silence' (185), but little does she know how boisterous their meal would be. What follows is the greatest feast the servants will have: 'a great weight of best beef' (186), the vegetables in Worcester dishes, and potatoes that, finally, are well-cooked. In their last recounted moment of communal dining, the remarkable immersion into laughter is a fitting point to examine the role of humour throughout the entire novel.

The humour is set up in the narrative introduction to the scene, a rare enough occurrence that it merits attention: 'Her Albert had been sent to bed. By this time he was probably running naked on the steeply sloping roofs high up' (186). Along with his absence, the meal is without Mrs Welch, who is in Dublin at the doctor's, Miss Swift, who is in the nursery dying 'inch by inch' (186), Miss Burch, also sick, and Paddy. Raunce has been at loggerheads with Mrs Tennant over the found ring, he knows that his plans for the little home with Edith are under jeopardy and his own health has been troubling him for the last two weeks. Yet despite a solemn enough opening, at a point, 'in a wild and sudden good humour' (187), Raunce impersonates the Irish inquiry agent, teasing Edith in the process. In some ways, the absence of Paddy – who has been locked up for days with his birds – brings about this good cheer, and everybody's impersonation of Irish speech is a means of calling Paddy to

the table. Edith, initially out of the laughter, joins in with the others. Jane and Mary, invited to the table because of Mrs Welch's absence, speak more here than in the entire book: under the sway of laughter, Jane even tells a joke about Mrs Welch's absence: 'Oh I know I shouldn't but she drinks. All the time she drinks. She's only gone to Dublin to get another crate. She's like the wells, she's runnin' dry' (191). In the ultimate transgression, Raunce, who speaks 'roguish' (187), no longer cares if others hear him: when Edith tells him to 'hush', he responds gaily, "'And what do I care?'" he asked. "Now if you'd said 'Huth' I might've harkened. But detethtable's right'" (188). After this he begins to speak 'lordly' (188). Even when the speech turns serious, on the question of the missing ring, Raunce staunchly defends the servant community and turns to the humour at the end:

'We're plain honest folk we are. ... No,' he insisted with authority, 'there's a right and a wrong way to go about matters of this sort. There you are, it's 'ighly dithrething,' he ended as though, having noticed Edith's expression, he now intended to turn all this off into a joke. If that was his intention it was immediately successful. ... they all with one accord burst out lispng ... In no time there hilarity had grown until each effort was received with shrieks, Edith's this time amongst the loudest. (190)

Raunce here navigates between the serious questions of morality and right with humour, for that is the only way he can defend himself. When questioned by Mrs Tennant, there is no proper way to respond, pantry Albert's silence under questioning makes clear (157). In the company of what are now equals, laughter can be made itself felt, and it can also bring out the truth about matters which were previously hidden (how Mrs Welch gets her liquor).



The carnivalesque dinner has one silent participant, young Albert: ‘Like a class at school when given the signal to break up they all with one accord burst out lisp[ing], with the exception of Raunce’s Albert’ (190). By this exclusion, the narrative makes clear the conflict previously implied: humour does not operate by itself but always against the background of desperation and seriousness. Albert is taking things to heart, and his inability to laugh off jokes points to a certain moral hardening that the other characters do not have. His inability to relate to Raunce, the spurning by Edith, and the coming under fire by Mrs Tennant have made him give notice. In the novel’s previous moment of gaiety, the playing of blind man’s buff, he was coddled by the others to play along (108). After having always been ‘Bert his [Raunce’s] pantry boy’ (18) or ‘Mr Raunce’s Albert’ (108), he will now go over to the other side and join up, and the concerns he has – fighting honourably and seeing to his family – cannot be shared with the others, who remain fighting imaginary I.R.A. men and looking for treasures in the ground. The grand meal at the novel’s close places Albert outside the community, showing, in true Hobbesian fashion, that laughter always has its victims.

This interpretation is strengthened when considering the ambiguous nature of communal eating in *Pack My Bag*, which has so much about food that it is surprising that it has not been remarked upon. Rather than being life-giving, eating is characterized throughout the memoir through the prism of guilt. Rationing during the Great War meant that ‘[f]ood was always in our minds, began to haunt our dreams ... there was not enough and what there was of bad quality’ (37). Yet his family did

not suffer, because they had converted the house into a convalescent hospital for wounded officers, thus qualifying them for extra rations: ‘we got the marvellous food because we were feeding them up to go back to be killed’ (60). Green reminisces about the ‘delicious food we had because of them, clotted cream and any amount of butter, things which in those days were so impossibly remote *as to seem barbaric delicacies* of which one had read and yet would have no chance of tasting’ (68, emphasis supplied). Food has become an ‘Other’, a foreign body, a paradoxical combination of incomprehensible nature (‘barbaric’) and civilization (‘delicacies’). These wounded officers who bring to the household this food are ‘people meant to die, they did not fit into life and in no respect into life as we knew it’ (61).

After the war was over, his family went over to Holland in ‘a trip given over to eating ... after three days we were all of us ill, and of course bad tempered’ (86). Within the family, mealtimes are moments of tension. ‘How much do you love me—more than toffee?’ his mother would ask (10), essentially testing his maternal love against his appetite. The only memories he has of his nanny concern food: the toffee they made in the nursery and her being ‘sick after eating fish’ (5). When coming down to breakfast, his mother would say ‘chair boys’ and ‘we sat on these back against the wall and did not talk’ (9-10). Rather than uniting the family in conviviality – Brillat-Savarin notes that it is during the meal that ‘language should be born and perfected’ – for Green the meal is a time when the children are forced aside and refused permission to express themselves, making food a means of separating

children from adults.<sup>146</sup> The entry into adulthood comes during hunting days when ‘we had poached eggs for tea when we got home, just as our parents did, and this was the first sign of growing up’ (54). In his schooldays, when another’s boy family visited it was customary to invite friends to have ‘boiled eggs’ when out for tea, even though ‘news of relatives who had lost their lives’ was often the purpose of the visit (39). Mealtimes, in other words, rather than bringing individuals together, is treated through either class guilt or the sense that eating together is not an escape out of loneliness but a further retreat into it.

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In *Concluding* the dance is the event around which the entire day is structured. Meant to celebrate the Institute’s Founders, there is a communal impulse within this return to origins. When Pausanias travelled through Greece in the second century A.D., every city could recount the history of their founder, who was honoured with temples and festivals.<sup>147</sup> The founders of Rome looked over their project and the citizens of the republic prayed to them and tried to live up to their exploits; ‘all authority derives from this foundation’, Arendt notes, citing Pliny’s insistence that the *auctores imperii Romani conditoresque* was the basis upon the living derived their authority.<sup>148</sup> Yet the hollow authority of founders was pointed out by John Millar in the early nineteenth century:

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<sup>146</sup> Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du goût, ou Méditations de gastronomie transcendante* (Paris: A. Saetelet, 1826), p. 534.

<sup>147</sup> Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), p. 135.

<sup>148</sup> Arendt, ‘What Is Authority?’, p. 122.

As the greater part of those heroes and sages that are reputed to have been the founders and modellers of states, are only recorded by uncertain tradition, or by fabulous history, we may be allowed to suspect that, from the obscurity in which they are placed, or from the admiration of distant posterity, their labours have been exaggerated and misrepresented.<sup>149</sup>

Rousseau, one recalls, tried to breathe new life into these festivals of the city, recommending to the republics of Corsica and Poland the need for public festivals celebrating the sovereignty and togetherness of the community.

The ‘Founder’s Day’ dance in *Concluding* is an attempt in this direction, a means of solidifying communal identity: the school’s members must ‘take pride in what has been entrusted to us’ (75). It also is a moment of communion: ‘tonight of all nights we’re all in the party together’ (147). Yet Miss Edge later admits that the Institute was created ‘out of a void. Believe me, Mr Rock, it was a vacuum indeed when we first came’ (169). The ‘invention of tradition,’ Eric Hobsbawm argues in a different context,<sup>150</sup> is prefigured here by Miss Edge:

The decorations for Founder’s Day were already traditional, although the Institute had been open for only ten years. In consequence there was no need for Edge to give orders, her presence was designed to preclude innovation ..... (113)

This statement clearly cuts both ways. Edge’s authority is not built upon an actual exercise of power but through an insinuation of it: her mere presence creates the orders and demands that she would otherwise give, thus insinuating that the transfer of domination has been imbibed by her charges. Yet the falsity of the tradition of the dance cannot be more clearly stated, especially when considering that the geographic

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<sup>149</sup> John Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (Bristol: Thoemmes Antiquarian Books, 1990 [1806]), p. 7.

<sup>150</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions’, in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1-14.

space upon which the Institute stands was usurped from a private freeholder and that the dance takes place in ‘the Banqueting Hall, burned down in Edwardian times’ (102). That the fire which ended the feast occurred in the pejoratively tradition-bound Edwardian England is not, one feels, accidental. Nor is the irony of celebrating the school’s traditions through an event which is based on the suspension of order.

In Bakhtin’s analysis, the carnival creates a space where order is turned upside down and hierarchies are suspended.<sup>151</sup> There are attempts within *Concluding* to surround the dance with a sense of magic and wonder. Dancing opens at the third time the music is heard, three long being associated with mystery and power – but in *Concluding*, events occurring thrice are not auspicious. In the opening, events which occur in threes include Rock’s groaning (upon rising) and the gardener, Adams, falling silent. At the novel’s close, Rock walks back to his cottage and hears ‘the house singing back in a whisper, and he just heard it thrice; “Mar .... ee,” “mareee”, “...eee”’ (201). The dance also begins with Baker’s and Edge’s ‘triumphal entry’, the triumph being, of course, the Roman victory and salute. These powers, though, are contested by Mr Rock, who imagines them to be ‘fabulous Neroines’, thus portraying the triumph in a different light (119). The dancing of Baker and Edge, who ‘lovingly swayed in one another’s bony grip, on the room’s exact centre, to and fro’ in ‘spinsterish rest in movement’, is grotesque (157). They also fail to control the communal identity of the dance once Rock arrives ‘unmasked’; Miss Edge feels his presence to be a ‘preposterous persecution’ (174) but is powerless to prevent it. The

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<sup>151</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, passim.

girls who dance are said to be ‘entranced, in a soft ritual beneath azalea and rhododendron’ (157), a motif that recalls anthropological investigations of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century like Frazer’s *Golden Bough* and Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance*. These flowers, though, had earlier been imagined as funeral garlands, with Miss Edge terrified that underneath the pile of flowers for the dance’s decoration would be Mary’s rotting corpse: ‘buzzing flies might stay round the bouquets, turn all to decay and desecration’ (103). This anthropological turn also involves the voodoo doll, ‘a rabbit Rag Doll dressed gaily in miniature Institute pyjamas, painted with a grotesque caricature of Mary’s features on its own flat face’ (114) – this doll makes Miss Edge faint.

All this language of the sacred – ritual, desecration – underscores how the dance quickly degenerates into a moment of forbidden sexuality. Liz dancing with Sebastian is a ‘little display of animalism’ (174), leading Miss Edge to speak of an ‘infection’ that must be isolated (177). The students are no better: ‘each child ... pulled at her partner’s waist to speed it, to gyrate quicker, get much more hot ....’ (186). The girls become, Robert Phelps notes, ‘intoxicated, at one, indivisible.’<sup>152</sup> Finally, Mr Rock is dragged down ‘a steep flight of stairs that led to the depths’ and then Moira, one of the students, makes ‘the usual offer of herself, ... the endless prize of her fair person’ (163). Her offer is rebuffed but another girl, Melissa, does the same to him, laying ‘a cheek against him, then rolled it over until her lips brushed his’ (181). Through the darkness of the dance and the rhythm of the music, the girls’ sexual energy comes out, and what is initially feared to be the preying of

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<sup>152</sup> Phelps, ‘The Vision of Henry Green’, p. 617.

innocent adolescent sexuality by outsiders is revealed to come from the girls themselves. Moira says of the silent gardener, Adams, ‘We call that man the answer to the virgin’s prayer’ (183). Rather than creating a communal identity, the dance is the site where the community is shown to be both hollow and where the girls’ individuality, long suppressed, comes out – but in what terrifying ways.

*Closure, Concluding, Conclusions*

In a 1946 symposium on the future of the novel, Rose Macaulay observed that ‘life has during the past years been disintegrated, broken into odd, unshapely bits, one not fitting into another; discontinuity has been the mood of our brittle time. Can we fit the pieces together, weld them into a coherent shape?’<sup>153</sup> While the challenge that wartime brought to the novel form was identified by Green in 1941, Macaulay’s implicit argument about the sustainability and appropriateness of fiction after the war rests upon the traditional theory that an artwork needs to be an integral whole; absent this, the run of adjectives spells out, the textual body will be disabled. Stephen Spender put it more simply: ‘[w]holeness is everything’.<sup>154</sup>

One critical element providing this coherence and unity is a proper conclusion – so says the traditional theory of endings. For many critics, novels can only be assessed to be complete and whole if they are ended properly. Meaning arises only through an ending, according to Frank Kermode: ‘We can perceive a duration only when it is organized ... All such plotting presupposes and requires that

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<sup>153</sup> Rose Macaulay, ‘The Future of Fiction’, *New Writing and Daylight*, 7 (1946), 71-5 (p. 72).

<sup>154</sup> Spender, *World within World*, p. 62.

an end will bestow upon the whole duration and meaning.’<sup>155</sup> For Bernard Bergonzi, ‘[t]he novel is concerned, above all, ... with imposing a beginning, a middle, and an end on the flux of experience’.<sup>156</sup> Even Edward Said acknowledged that there is ‘an imaginative and emotional need for unity, a need to apprehend an otherwise dispersed number of circumstances and to put them in some sort of telling order, sequential, moral, or logical.’<sup>157</sup>

Modernist literature challenged this conventional view of closure.<sup>158</sup> For E.M. Forster, ‘average novelists’ end their works through either marriage or death; by implication, proper literary artists must strive to move beyond these hackneyed resolutions.<sup>159</sup> In his ‘Art of Fiction’, Henry James ridiculed the ‘distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs, and cheerful remarks’ in the Victorian novel; in his view, this falsified experience and abandoned artistry.<sup>160</sup> But the solution James hit upon in his own novels was subtly criticized by Conrad:

These solutions are legitimate inasmuch as they satisfy the desire for finality, for which our hearts yearn with a longing greater than the longing for the loaves and fishes of this earth. Perhaps the only true desire of mankind, coming thus to light in its hours of leisure, is to be set at rest. One is never set at rest by Mr. Henry James’s novels. His books end as an episode in life ends. You remain with the sense of the life still going on; and even the subtle presence of the dead is felt in that silence that comes upon the artist-creation

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<sup>155</sup> Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, pp. 45-6.

<sup>156</sup> Bernard Bergonzi, *The Situation of the Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 13.

<sup>157</sup> Said, *Beginnings*, p. 41.

<sup>158</sup> Alan Friedman, *The Turn of the Novel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 27; Barbara Hernstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 237; Mariana Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 18.

<sup>159</sup> Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, p. 95.

<sup>160</sup> Henry James, ‘The Art of Fiction’, in *Theory of Fiction: Henry James*, ed. by James E Miller (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), p. 32.



when the last word has been read. It is eminently satisfying, but it is not final. Mr. Henry James, great artist and faithful historian, never attempts the impossible.<sup>161</sup>

The paradox Conrad identifies – to have a definitive ending but to not write falsely – is the starting point for William Thickstun’s survey of closure in modernist novels. Thickstun argues that modernists ‘reject the use of conventional endings that too obviously seem to violate integrity and plausibility of character in the interest of predetermined aesthetic ends’, but modernist writers ‘still wish to close the aesthetic circle, to provide some final connection between their characters and their plots.’<sup>162</sup>

Virginia Woolf had already identified the problem in a 1925 essay on Chekhov:

These stories are inconclusive, we say, and proceed to frame a criticism based upon the assumption that stories ought to conclude in a way that we recognize. In so doing, we raise the question of our own fitness as readers. Where the tune is familiar and the end emphatic . . . as it is in most Victorian fiction, we can scarcely go wrong, but where the tune is unfamiliar and the end a note of interrogation or merely the information that they went on talking, as it is in Tchekov, we need a very daring and alert sense of literature to make us hear the harmony. Probably we have to read a great many stories before we feel, and the feeling is essential to our satisfaction, that we hold the parts together, and that Tchekov is not merely rambling disconnectedly, but struck now this note, now that with intention, in order to complete his meaning.<sup>163</sup>

While Auerbach dubs *To the Lighthouse* (1929) a ‘random fragment plucked from the course of a life’, Woolf’s analysis does not deny that an ending creates artistic wholeness: Chekhov’s artistry consists in being able to end without thumping out the

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<sup>161</sup> Conrad, ‘Henry James: An Appreciation’ (1905), in *Notes on Life and Letters*, op. cit., pp. 9-19 (pp. 18-9).

<sup>162</sup> William R. Thickstun, *Visionary Closure in the Modern Novel* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), pp. 8, 9.

<sup>163</sup> Woolf, ‘The Russian Point of View’ (1925), in *Essays*, I, 240-1.

steps of the last procession.<sup>164</sup> His conclusions are satisfying because they ‘hold the parts together’; without this, Woolf seems to argue, they would be careless or random, even worse than a traditional happy ending where ‘we can scarcely go wrong’. Wayne Booth later noted that in great works of art, open endings are so ‘only in very limited respects’, for they always ‘weave their various threads into a final harmony.’<sup>165</sup>

While Woolf was one of many modernist novelists who wanted to liberate the form from stifling tradition, Green’s case is more complex and has divided critics. Stokes argues that his novels and criticism manifest a belief in ‘the wholeness and unity of a novel.’<sup>166</sup> More recent critics disagree: Mackay speaks of ‘Green’s unusually frivolous version of the modernist resistance to closure’ while Adams more pointedly observes a ‘refusal of Green’s novels to conclude in conventional manners’.<sup>167</sup> Stokes’s argument does not deal with closure *per se* but occurs in a discussion of stylistic idiosyncracies. Mackay and Adams, who directly deal with closure, have observed an important facet of Green’s narrative practice, but Green stated their point quite clearly in an interview: ‘All my books were written as if they hadn’t ended and as if they’d start again the next morning.’<sup>168</sup> The last line of *Doting* makes that point explicit: ‘The next day they all went on very much the same’ (337). This preference for failing to conclude partly stems from his view that ‘[o]ne so

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<sup>164</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 547.

<sup>165</sup> Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 298.

<sup>166</sup> Stokes, *Novels of Henry Green*, p. 189 (emphasis original).

<sup>167</sup> Mackay, *Modernism and World War II*, p. 107; Adams, *Alternative Paradigms*, p. 114.

<sup>168</sup> Lambourne, ‘No Thundering Horses’, p. 64.

seldom learns the end of things in life.’<sup>169</sup> I would like to extend the analysis by arguing that Green went beyond simply writing ‘open’ endings. By refusing to privilege unity and continuity within a text, he unsettled the prevailing belief that an art work required wholeness.<sup>170</sup> It is not so much that Green’s novels are inconclusive, lacking proper endings, but that they are structured in such a manner that no resolution could ever be satisfactory; there is, in other words, an almost wilful crippling of the novel form.

Green’s larger narrative practice undermines the possibility of closure. Underdeveloped back story, I have previously argued, creates unspecified characters. Rather than depending upon the past to define their reality, his preference is to highlight the present moment. This reluctance to privilege back story arises from Green’s sense that characters, like people, are inconsistent. Because their self-presentation is coloured in response to a particular context, there is no ‘authentic’ self driving behaviour – habits and routines may condition action, but these are rarely individualized since they arise from social class, institutions or age. The implication is that closure can never be conclusive because new experiences or situations will result in different actions.

For example, *Loving* ends conventionally, with a marriage: ‘The next day Raunce and Edith left without a word of warning. Over in England they were married and lived happily ever after’ (204). While completing the circle with the novel’s opening – ‘[o]nce upon a day’ meets its fairy-tale end in ‘happily ever after’

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<sup>169</sup> Green, ‘Impenetrability’, in *Surviving*, p. 188.

<sup>170</sup> See John Bayley, *The Uses of Division: Unity and Disharmony in Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976), p. 12.

– this is a mock ending that cannot be taken seriously. The reader can believe that Edith and Raunce left the house, but everything after that is uncertain: will they arrive in England? will they actually marry? Little can be known of their future because they do not exist as characters unless they are servants (of a particular category, Raunce as a recently-promoted butler and Edith as a house maid) in neutral Ireland. ‘[T]ake someone out of their position in life and you find a different person altogether,’ Miss Burch says (42), a statement that the novel has explored by showing Raunce’s change in character after being elevated to butler. The numerous questions that this facetious closure raises cannot be answered, but in many ways they are beside the point. The reality the novel describes does not extend to far-away England: ‘For this was in Eire where there is no blackout’ (18).

The other narrative practice which inhibits closure in Green’s novels is the devaluation of plot. While Forster lamented (‘Yes—oh, dear, yes—the novel tells a story’) the need for plot, Green’s facetiousness towards it devalues closure, for there is nothing to wrap up.<sup>171</sup> Robert Adams states that ‘open form’ brings into prominent display a major unresolved conflict so that the reader can imaginatively conclude the work.<sup>172</sup> Yet some of Green’s novels end with major mysteries unresolved: what happens to the missing schoolgirl in *Concluding?*; are Mary Pomfret and Philip Weatherby related?; is Charley Summers the father of Riley? Certain symbols that seem to be critical to unlocking the novel’s meaning, like the birds in *Living* or the peacocks in *Loving*, turn out to be dead-ends. Moreover, it is not true to say that

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<sup>171</sup> Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, p. 26.

<sup>172</sup> Robert M. Adams, *Strains of Discord: Studies in Literary Openness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958), p. 13.

Green's novels do not have a plot; they all do, though sometimes the plots are so simple that they do not seem like plots at all. *Party Going* boils down to the mechanical question of whether or not the trains will leave again; *Loving* relates what happens when the servants get the run of the house; *Concluding* tells the story of a day at a state school; *Nothing* is about two romances; *Doting* is about an elderly man's search for youthful love. Even *Blindness*, the most formally traditional of Green's novels, has an insignificant plot: how will a budding author react to being blinded? To summarize any of Green's novels in such a manner, though, robs them of their particular interest, which comes from minutely detailing the complexity of behaviour in a variety of situations and observing the minor variations across observed experience. How these situations arise and how they are related are more important than what actually happens, and so '[t]he old man invariably forgot the end of his own stories' (*Caught*, 73).

This does not necessarily mean that Green's novels lack formal coherence or unity. The most important activity of his narrators is the selection of material, and his use of parallelism, I have argued, links scenes and establishes meaning across scenes and characters. But this creates interconnections within a work rather than a broad, structuring framework. Closure is always suspended in Green's novels because it denies their fundamental purpose, which is to be lives of their own.

### **Conclusion**

If modernity is, Marshall Berman argues, ‘a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal’, then Green’s novels are interesting studies of at least the first part of that statement.<sup>173</sup> His use of disabled characters and his conscious disabling of narrative form and standard language reflects the breakdown of modern society. While sometimes these disabilities worked metaphorically, I have also tried to make the case for placing physical disability in the foreground.

But do Green’s novels answer Berman’s second condition of modernity, perpetual renewal? There is no promise of utopia within them, and no character finds comfort in the divine or peace on this earth. Even love is no escape: Craigan in *Living* condemns it for being a kind of prison, while Charley and Edith in *Loving* leave behind neutral Ireland to try their luck in wartime England. Yet for all the despair that this might cause, the renewal comes not through the continual search for something better but by appreciating what already exists. At the end of *Caught*, Richard Roe has attempted to recount his fire-fighting experience. His story is full of gaps and omissions yet he stutters to get it out; by this point in the novel, there is so much that he has kept inside and not properly understood. But his sister-in-law, rather than attempting to soothe him, begins to raise her voice when the story touches upon Pye: ‘I shall always hate him, and his beastly sister’ (198). This causes Roe to explode with rage: ‘He let go. “God damn you,” he shouted, releasing everything, “you get on my bloody nerves, all you bloody women with all your talk’ (198). Although he feels bad about using such language, Roe has finally let go of his awful

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<sup>173</sup> Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 15.

experiences and feels 'that he had got away at last' (198). He is alone for only an instant; his son Christopher comes into the room and Roe yells at him too:

'Get out,' and he added,  
'Well, anyway, leave me alone till after tea, can't you?' (198)

Green makes these separate paragraphs, which gives the novel a kind of stubborn hope in the future. It is not a false hope that things will turn out for the best: the fact is that Roe is estranged from his son, lives as a widower, has endured trauma in his work and has alienated his family. But Roe will confront this, and in the days to come will have chances to repair some of his mistakes but also, undoubtedly, will make others.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

It is almost impossible to be comfortable within Green's novels in the same way that we speak of being inside the fictional world of Stendhal, Thomas Mann, or Marcel Proust. There is within Green's fiction, as Rod Mengham astutely notes, a nagging feeling that any reading is vulnerable to the worry that it is incomplete because it does not seem to drop to the depths of what is expressed.<sup>1</sup> This is partly due to Green's narrative forms, the means by which he minimized plot, narrative presence and psychology. Because there is no single character whose fortune is followed, the reader is constantly pulled from one scene to another by a revolving cast of characters whose motivations are both far too ordinary and maddeningly inexplicable. The accumulation of dialogue – for if anything happens in Green's novels, it is endless talk – followed by action leads to 'a glimmering of what is going on in someone', Green once explained.<sup>2</sup> This 'glimmering', situated at the border of surface appearances and a deeper reality, is faint and uncertain. The task Green sets readers is to be actively engaged in searching for these short-lived moments. Yet his

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<sup>1</sup> Mengham, *Idiom of Time*, p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Green, 'A Novelist to His Readers: I', in *Surviving*, p. 141.



fiction also recognizes that these moments are dim reflections, which can at any moment be upturned.

When Henry Green called C.M. Doughty ‘monumentally lonely’, he uncannily described the fate of his own writings, which critics have considered autonomous art works dissociated from any context.<sup>3</sup> This thesis has argued that such a view undercuts the richness of Green’s fictional universe, which not only carried forth the modernist project of experimentation in form and language but did so in order to make sense of his own times. In that essay on Doughty, written just after he completed *Pack My Bag*, a memoir whose stated purpose is to trace those events and circumstances which developed a writer’s mode of expression, Green calls for writers to move beyond pure subjectivity. Rather, they should, ‘by the impact of a life strange to them and by their honest acceptance of this,’ adopt their writing to the changing times.<sup>4</sup> ‘In considering Doughty’s writing,’ Green begins his essay, ‘it is necessary to examine his circumstances’ – yet this is exactly what critics of Green have largely avoided doing.<sup>5</sup>

It would be ridiculous to claim that Green’s novels are ‘social reporting’ or ‘social history’.<sup>6</sup> That would be an impoverished reduction of what his novels mean. There is a great deal of formal artificiality within Green’s fiction, but rather than seeing this as an end in itself, I have attempted to situate Green’s formal methods as responsive to both literary and social contexts. My approach could be said to have

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<sup>3</sup> Green, ‘Apologia’, in *Surviving*, p. 92.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>6</sup> These terms are used to describe the novel form in Graham Hough, *An Essay on Criticism* (London: Duckworth, 1966), p. 56.

started from considering the nature of Green's titles, those infamous gerunds: both noun and verb, timeless yet resolutely of the present, the gerund is the verbal form *par excellence* of concrete immediacy and abstract remove. Green's novels operate at this point of tension between social reality and artificial form.

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