

Contextualising British Experimental Novelists in the Long Sixties

Joseph Andrew Darlington

School of Arts and Media
University of Salford, UK

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, January 2014

Contents

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----|
| Acknowledgements..... | 4 |
| Abstract..... | 5 |
| Introduction..... | 6 |
| Chapter 1: The Experimental Writers and The Sixties | |
| 1.1: “White Heat”: The Scientific Sixties | |
| 1.1.1: “Experimental Literature?”..... | 14 |
| 1.1.2: Science and the Sixties..... | 20 |
| 1.1.3: Groupings, Movements, | |

| | |
|-------------------------------------------|----|
| Contemporaries..... | 24 |
| 1.1.4: Against the Nineteenth Century | |
| Novel..... | 28 |
| 1.1.5: The Technological | |
| Context..... | 32 |
| 1.1.6: “The | |
| Establishment”..... | 37 |
| 1.2: The Experimental Novelist in Context | |
| 1.2.1: Post-war | |
| Prosperity..... | 42 |
| 1.2.2: Calder and Better | |
| Books..... | 47 |
| 1.2.3: The Widening World of | |
| Education..... | 51 |
| 1.2.4: Writers and the | |
| BBC..... | 55 |
| 1.2.5: The Arts | |
| Council..... | 59 |
| 1.2.6: Public Politics and Pay | |
| Disputes..... | 63 |
| 1.2.7: Feminism: A Revolution in | |
| Progress..... | 67 |
| 1.2.8: Anthony Burgess: A Case Study in | |
| Influence..... | 71 |
| 1.3: The Death of Keynesianism | |
| 1.3.1: Keynesianism versus | |
| Neoliberalism..... | 75 |
| 1.3.2: The End of the | |
| Experiment..... | 79 |
| 1.3.3: The “Experimental” and the | |
| “Postmodern”..... | 83 |

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Chapter 2: “Ground Down, and Other Clichés”: Class, Crisis and Consciousness in B.S. Johnson | |
| 2.1: Critical Understanding of B.S. Johnson..... | 87 |
| 2.2: Working Classness and Labour | |
| Value..... | 94 |
| 2.3: “Meritocracy” and Class | |
| Anxiety..... | 106 |
| 2.4: Authenticity and | |
| Truth..... | 114 |
| 2.5: Turning Towards | |
| Terror..... | 122 |

Chapter 3: “Without Taboos There Can Be No Tragedy”: Spectres of War and Rituals of Peace in the Work of Eva Figes

| | |
|---------------------------------------------|-----|
| 3.1: Eva Figes as a Post-War Writer..... | 128 |
| 3.2: A Feminist Anthropology..... | 131 |
| 3.3: The War and Women’s Experience..... | 142 |
| 3.4: Journalism and Politics..... | 158 |

Chapter 4: “A Committee Plans Unpleasant Experiments”: The Cut-Up Culture of Alan Burns

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 4.1: Critical Understanding of Alan Burns..... | 165 |
| 4.2: Burroughs, Burns and the Physical Manipulation of Text..... | 167 |
| 4.3: The Experimental Novels of Alan Burns 1961- 1973..... | 178 |

Chapter 5: “Another City, Same Hotel”: Ann Quin and the Happening Society

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 5.1: The Permissive Moment..... | 204 |
| 5.2: Desublimation through Style..... | 209 |
| 5.3: Artaud and Ritual..... | 220 |
| 5.4: Experimental Theatre; Being and Happening..... | 226 |

Chapter 6: “Disembodied Voiceless Logos”: Recuperating the Radical in Christine Brooke-Rose

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 6.1: Critical Understanding of Christine Brooke- Rose..... | 238 |
| 6.2: May ’68 and the Postmodern..... | 245 |
| 6.3: The Experimental Novels of Brooke- Rose..... | 254 |

Thesis

| | |
|-----------------|-----|
| Conclusion..... | 273 |
|-----------------|-----|

Works

Cited.....
.....276

Figures.....
.....293

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my great appreciation to the University of Salford for funding this project, my patient and forthcoming supervisor Glyn White and co-supervisor Peter Buse for all their help, and all of the administrators and techs that come together to make a university happen. The Harry Ransom Centre at the University of Austin, TX was a great help to me in awarding me a Fellowship that allowed me to visit their archives. Thanks also to the U.S. Embassy for granting me a visa, eventually. Acknowledgement is due to Melanie Seddon and David Hucklesby for bringing certain details in the thesis to light for me, and to Nick Middleton for his hospitality as London host. Thanks to Stephen Dippnall, my co-conspirator in pedagogy, and to Jen Morgan for her righteous spirit. I offer my thanks to the many librarians, archivists and others around the world who provided me with access to their resources, with special mention to the International Anthony Burgess Foundation and the ever-helpful Paula Price. My final thanks to my family for all of their help and support along the way.

Abstract

This thesis focuses upon five novelists – B.S. Johnson, Eva Figs, Alan Burns, Ann Quin, and Christine Brooke-Rose – whose works during the 1960s and early 1970s (Marwick’s “Long Sixties”) represent a unique approach to formal innovation; an approach contemporaneously labelled as “experimental”. A number of attempts have been made to categorise and group these texts with varying levels of success. Utilising new archive research, this thesis aims to unpack for the first time the personal relationships between these writers, their relationship to the historical moment in which they worked, and how these contextual elements impacted upon their experimental novels. The thesis is broken into six chapters; a long introductory chapter in which the group is placed in context and five chapters in which each writer’s career is reassessed individually. The B.S. Johnson chapter focuses upon how shifting class formations during the post-war era impact upon the writer’s sense of class consciousness within his texts. The Eva Figs chapter encounters her novels through the consideration of her contribution to feminist criticism and the impact of the Second World War. The Alan Burns chapter investigates the impact of William Burroughs upon British experimental writing and the politics of physical textual manipulation. The Ann Quin chapter engages with experimental theatre and new theories of being appearing in the Sixties which palpably inform her work. The Christine Brooke-Rose chapter reassesses her four novels between 1964 and 1975 in relation to the idea of “experimental literature” proposed in the rest of the thesis in order to argue its fundamental difference from the postmodernism Brooke-Rose practices in her novels after 1984. Overall, by presenting the “experimental” novelists of the Sixties in context this thesis argues that a unity of purpose can be located within the group in spite of the heterogeneity of aesthetics created by each individual writer; overcoming the primary challenge such a grouping presents to literary scholars.

Introduction

Scope

This research centres on the five writers: B.S. Johnson, Eva Figs, Alan Burns, Ann Quin, and Christine Brooke-Rose. It seeks to unpack their meaning as a group of writers by placing them within their contemporary context. Previous studies have centred mostly upon these novelists as individual writers. Utilising these studies, new archive research, and aspects of historical materialist practice I aim to demonstrate that these writers can be legitimately considered as a group and that doing so provides us with a unique perspective on the literary culture of Britain in the Sixties.

The majority of publications concentrating on the above writers are studies of B.S. Johnson. The most notable monographs are Philip Tew's *B.S. Johnson: A Critical Reading* (Manchester UP, 2001) and Jonathan Coe's biography *Like a Fiery Elephant: The Story of B.S. Johnson* (Picador, 2004). There have also been two published essay collections focusing on Johnson – Tew and White's *Re-Reading B.S. Johnson* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and a special edition of the journal *Critical Engagements* 4.1/4.2 – as well as another forthcoming collection from Palgrave Macmillan and the soon to be launched *BSJ: The B.S. Johnson Journal*. Christine Brooke-Rose has also received critical attention in the form of Sarah Birch's *Christine Brooke-Rose and Contemporary Fiction* (Oxford UP, 1994) and the collection *Utterly Other Discourse: The Texts of Christine Brooke-Rose* (Dalkey Archive Press, 2005) edited by Ellen J. Friedman and Richard Martin. The *Review of Contemporary Fiction* devoted half of Summer 1985 Vol. 5 No. 2 to studies on B.S. Johnson and half of Summer 1997 Vol. 17 No. 2 to Alan Burns. Glyn White's *Reading the Graphic Surface* (Manchester UP, 2005) also devotes considerable attention to Johnson and Brooke-Rose. There have been a number of paper-length studies of these writers published, the majority of which are referenced within the body of this work.

The writers have appeared in a number of studies concentrating upon post-war literature as a whole. Philip Tew's *The Contemporary British Novel* (Continuum, 2004) and Sebastian Groes' *British Fiction in the Sixties* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) offer brief readings of Johnson, Quin and Brooke-Rose and their place in contemporary culture. Andrzej Gasiorek's *Postwar British Fiction: Realism and After* (Edward Arnold, 1995) also makes use of Johnson and Burns, although it is largely to present them as examples of experimental writing "pushed too far" (Gasiorek). The only full-length attempt to categorise the writers as a group so far is Francis Booth's self-published *Amongst Those Left: The British Experimental Novel 1940-1980* (Lulu, 2012) although the inclusion of twenty-five "experimental" writers in total rules out critical and biographical connection in favour of an encyclopaedic presentation. The two collections *The Imagination on Trial* (Allison and Busby, 1981) edited by Alan Burns and Charles Sugnet and *Beyond the Words* (Hutchinson, 1975) edited by Giles Gordon represent the only attempts by the writers and those around them to present themselves as a group in print.

By reading these writers as a group my work aims to contribute not only significant critical and biographical material for those undertaking studies of the writers as distinct entities but also to make the case for reassessing the position of these writers as marginal forces within their contemporary culture by outlining their connections to a number of historically important developments and the resonances these create within their writing. Although the implications of "grouping" are problematised within the first chapter, the shared outlook and cultural positioning of these writers taken as an aesthetic movement should be thought of as considerably significant

in the literary-cultural history of Britain the twentieth century.

Resources Used

In conducting this research I made use of both online and physical archives, a number of which I could only access due to special circumstances. First among these is the Harry Ransom Centre at the University of Austin, Texas, who awarded me a Dissertation Fellowship: the resulting research appears in both Chapter 6 and in a separate research paper. The British Library also allowed me access to their B.S. Johnson and Eva Figs archive holdings prior to their being properly catalogued. The Lilly Library of Indiana University, Bloomington, provided me with digital copies of their Alan Burns and Ann Quin holdings. In Manchester, the John Rylands library gave me access to the Carcanet archive which holds Christine Brooke-Rose's papers from the 1980s onwards. The International Anthony Burgess Foundation have been a great help from the beginning providing me with access to their uncatalogued archive and directing me towards items of interest.

Online resources used include the ubiquitous Googlebooks – most notably the Ngram Viewer 2.0 released in 2012 – as well as MLA International Bibliography and JSTOR journal databases. The British Newspaper Archive portal was of great use, as was access to underground materials from ozit.co.uk and internationaltimes.it. The Unfinished Histories project was opened to the online public in November 2013 and informed Chapter 5 (although no quotations appear in the finished chapter), as did the Ann Quin Facebook page. The numerous UK Government Freedom of Information officers who conducted searches on my behalf were very useful in clarifying some issues and only very rarely withheld information on the grounds of national interest. Finally, my work as co-editor of *BSJ: The B.S. Johnson Journal* has been of huge benefit not only in allowing me a preview of cutting-edge research but by connecting me to the considerable network of scholars, researchers, fans, friends and contemporaries of B.S. Johnson, all of whom provided me with extra perspective on the writer and his times.

Despite the numerous external archives made use of, the majority of secondary texts nevertheless came from the University of Salford library.

Structural Outline

The structure of this thesis comprises six chapters. The first chapter concerns the contextual background; how these writers can be considered a group and where this grouping intersects with the material conditions of the contemporary society. The following five chapters address each writer individually and in relation to an aspect of their society which is of resonant historical interest. Within this structure, the writers and their works act metonymically to an extent. Although the works of one writer may be considered in relation to a key concept (eg. Johnson's works in relation to class concerns) the insights unpacked during the reading also impact upon the readings in other chapters (eg. Quin's working class background, Burns' anarchism, Figs' polemics on the welfare state, or Brooke-Rose's alienation from May '68 class conflict, all benefit from an understanding of Sixties class anxiety unpacked in the Johnson chapter). As these readings involve a variety of conceptual approaches the stylistic qualities of each section also vary with the work being undertaken.

Chapter 1: The Experimental Writers and The Sixties is separated into three subsections, each of which is also divided into further subsections. The use of small sections allows the argument concerning the writers as a group within their context to be presented in a manner which addresses each important aspect in its turn. The first section, “‘White Heat’: The Scientific Sixties” outlines how these writers shared an identity both in terms of their own philosophy of the novel form and as equally marginalised by the mainstream literary industry. The importance of the “experimental” as a signifier in the discourse of Sixties science-inspired ideology is demonstrated and the ambiguous relationship these writers had with such ideas is unpacked. The second section, “The Experimental Novelist in Context”, concerns the various boosts and blockages presented by the post-war context and how these impacted on and were in turn impacted by the writers. The third section, “The Death of Keynesianism”, describes the social and economic events occurring at the end of the “long Sixties” which frame the end of the “experimental” writers as a group or an aesthetic and lay the foundations for “postmodernism” in its fullest sense.

Chapter 2: “Ground Down, and Other Clichés”: Class, Crisis and Consciousness in B.S. Johnson concentrates upon the class aspects underlying Johnson’s works. Making use of the newly-catalogued Johnson archive at the British Library the impact of the writer’s class-consciousness is traced from his editorship of *Universities Poetry* as a student through to the final novel he saw published within his lifetime, *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry*. The “meritocratic” imperatives underlying the post-war consensus are seen to result in a double alienation from both working and middle classes which, in turn, results in Johnson’s militant approach to aesthetics and form.

Chapter 3: “Without Taboos There Can Be No Tragedy”: Spectres of War and Rituals of Peace in the Work of Eva Figes concerns the memories of trauma and war that emerge in Figes’ writings and consider how this may impact upon the development of her feminist social and anthropological theory. Figes’ use of “experimental” form to present an alternative mode of being to a literary tradition framed by patriarchal structures is positioned both in terms of its historical contingency - her theoretical and journalistic work being solidly located at the cusp of the “Second Wave” – and its quasi-mystical concern for deep structures.

Chapter 4: “A Committee Plans Unpleasant Experiments”: The Cut-Up Culture of Alan Burns locates the works of Burns alongside the rise of William Burroughs as a cultural force and the popularity of physical manipulation of text as a technique (or, “cut-ups”). Using the various descriptions Burns gave of his working methods, provided both by published interviews, essays and archive materials, the development of his writing is described from 1961’s *Buster* through to 1973’s *The Angry Brigade*. These developments are considered in the light of the then-popular theories of Marcuse and the Situationists as well as Burns’ own contention that “experimental” literary form would incite an anarchist revolution in consciousness.

Chapter 5: “Another City, Same Hotel”: Ann Quin and the Happening Society engages with questions of censorship and “permissiveness” in the Sixties by reading Quin’s novels against the contemporary explosion in “experimental” theatre. Her immersive style is positioned alongside the popularity of Artaud and physical theatre (or,

“happenings”) as a means of expressing direct, unmediated experience. The limits of this project are considered in relation to Marcuse’s theory of “repressive desublimation” and the shifting attitudes to censorship which are unpacked as the chapter develops.

Chapter 6: “Disembodied Voiceless Logos”: Recuperating the Radical in Christine Brooke-Rose is largely composed of research undertaken at the Harry Ransom Centre archive and focuses upon how Brooke-Rose’s writing can be traced through historical moments; the phase of more relevance to this thesis beginning with her discovery of the *nouveau romanciers* in the earlier 1960s and ending during her lectureship at Vincennes in the early Seventies. Addressing the break between 1975’s *Thru* and 1984’s *Amalgamemnon*, this chapter argues that the process of enthusiasm, disillusion and cynicism surrounding her experiences in Paris put an end to Brooke-Rose’s “experimental” optimism for a new novel and inaugurates the “postmodern” irony which marks her later works. It also makes the case that earlier experimental works from the Sixties must, in light of this process, be re-read within their context rather than taken as simply “proto-postmodern”.

Taken as factors in a whole, the chapters focusing upon individual writers and their works therefore cover the impact of class relations, gender relations, the Second World War, cut-ups, happenings, the permissive society, the events in Paris known as “May ’68” and postmodernism. As important aspects in the cultural history of the Sixties these themes not only inform our debate concerning these particular writers but, by looking at these themes through the perspective of the “experimental” writers, we are provided with a new perspective on the Sixties as an era.

Theoretical Approach

The literary theory applied within this thesis is, where possible, intended to reflect the historical and contextual understanding of the writers to whose work it is applied. At times a non-contemporary theorist will be referred to in order to fully express the meaning contained within a passage, yet this too will seek to remain faithful to the meaning as framed by context. A large amount of theoretical material was engaged with in pursuing this project which will no doubt have left its mark upon the thinking and reading contained herein. However, it cannot be too strongly emphasised that the reading is throughout undertaken under the remit of the “Long Sixties” as a cultural moment. That is, not only as a period that exists in empirical facts, biography and written texts, but through a study of these, is seen to contain certain structures of feeling, modes of being, inclinations and orientations particular to the period, just as any period will have. The application of appropriate theory is necessary to negotiate our relationship with the past, especially such a recent past as the Sixties, a period both considerably familiar and simultaneously alien.

Chapter 1: The Experimental Writers and the Sixties

1.1 “White Heat”: The Scientific Sixties

1.1.1: “Experimental Literature?”

The first question which must be addressed when engaging with “experimental literature” is what exactly the word “experimental” means within such a context. The word itself emerges from the lexicon of the physical sciences, as in; “experiment: (*noun*) a scientific procedure undertaken to make a discovery, test a hypothesis, or demonstrate a known fact” (*OED*). However, during its transition into the language of literary criticism the word appears to lose any sense of specificity. Suggestively, “experimental literature” can imply difficult or esoteric writing, a certain exclusivity which is diametrically opposed to the “bestseller” or the “traditional novel”. It is a marginalising term which, nevertheless, can hold a certain allure for those interested in the marginal.

Bray, Gibbons and McHale, in their 2012 essay collection *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, embrace the term’s marginalising tendency. For them “experimentation makes alternatives visible and conceivable, and some of these alternatives become the foundations for future developments, whole new ways of writing, some of which eventually filter into the mainstream itself” (1). “Experimental literature” is never financially successful or popular, it is implied, but is rather a niche affair which is nevertheless highly influential. Experimenters are writers’ writers; generating innovations, some of which will eventually filter through to the general reading public at a pace acceptable to conventional tastes. Such a conception of “experimental” is highly evocative, a useful way of expressing certain tropes within literature, yet is doomed to provoke more exceptions than those that fit the rule. The tendency of essays within the collection to list writers and novels suggests how academics often prefer to find writers to fit tropes, rather than identifying tropes within the work of certain writers.

Conceptually, the term has a certain usefulness lent by its lack of any historical periodisation. Unlike “postmodernism” or “romanticism”, “experimental literature” can apply equally to Don DeLillo and Laurence Sterne, allowing critics to draw out transhistorical formal features or trace large-scale histories of English literature as a practice. Looked at in this manner one can see submerged within the term a liberal-humanist philosophy of historical progression – borrowed perhaps, like the term itself, from science – which posits literature in a state of constant development and improvement. Literary “experiments” push us forwards, towards better novels. Considering this, it is interesting to note the historical moments when the term “experimental literature” was at its most prevalent. Fig. 1 (293) indicates two periods in which the term’s usage grew exponentially, firstly in the 1930s and again in the 1960s to reach all-time peaks in 1968 and 1970. Two politically charged, popularly mythologised, post-war decades represent the periods in which “experimental literature” as a concept emerged into the zeitgeist. It is the second of these which is the focus of this study.

During the 1960s, some of the writers being most often labelled with the increasingly popular term were B.S. Johnson, Eva Figes, Ann Quin, Alan Burns and Christine Brooke-Rose. All writers of the post-war generation, all committed to innovation within the novel form, they represent some of the key proponents of the novel’s development in the 1960s. Equally, they were all largely dismissed by the literary press of their time and have been mostly neglected by academic studies since. Francis Booth, whose abandoned thesis on these and a number of other

writers was made available through self-publishing in 2012 as *Amongst Those Left: The British Experimental Novel 1940-1980*, highlights the ambiguities involved in attempting to categorise a group of writers as “experimental”: “there are certainly no shared techniques or styles which these novels have in common, and which are usually associated with experimental writing, but it is this lack of uniformity between the authors and within each author’s works which is precisely what makes them experimental” (687). In terms of form and content, a literary study can do little other than categorise them as uncategorisable. Hopefully, by treating “experimental literature” as a peculiarly 1960s term and focusing upon some of the writers it served to marginalise, a historical picture of the era as depicted from the margin will appear.

The ubiquity of the term “experimental” to describe almost all non-mainstream creative works by the end of the 1960s did not go unnoticed by those labelled in such a way. Eva Figes, writing in 1968, comments that “at no time in the past have books as different, say, as *Malone Dies* and *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* been awarded the same generic label and criticised as though they had anything in common” (“The Interior Landscape”). Even supportive critics such as Anthony Burgess (whose relationship with the group of writers in question is covered in part 2.9 of this section), who professed to “feel strongly about [B.S.] Johnson and about the entire experimental tradition, if one may use such an oxymoron”, still felt the need to criticise “experimentalism” elsewhere, in this case “the French, who, in my view, generally take to experiment because they lack talent” (“Foreword”, 20). The suspicion that “experimental” techniques might be used to wilfully obscure bad writing is a common occurrence amongst the contemporary critics making more and more use of the “generic label”.

Perhaps understandably, writers’ responses to the “experimental” label were nearly entirely negative, often dismissive and at times genuinely angry. B.S. Johnson, who famously responded to such labels “like red rags” (Coe, 397), describes in the essay “Aren’t You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?” how “‘experimental’ to most reviewers is almost always a synonym for ‘unsuccessful’. I object to the word *experimental* being applied to my own work” (19). His close friend Zulfikar Ghose, writing to Johnson in March 1973, mirrored such opinions, suggesting that “experimental had connotations of being provisional which are surely irrelevant”. Giles Gordon, introducing the 1975 collection *Beyond the Words*, featuring “eleven writers in search of a new fiction”, goes as far as to say that “if a novel is labelled as experimental or avant garde by a reader, then it seems to me that the book has failed in its primary function... to be a novel” (15).

However, when considering how writers express their evident frustration at the label there can be found some general hints as to what “experimental” practice might be assumed to mean within their works. B.S. Johnson describes how he makes “experiments, but the unsuccessful ones are quietly hidden away” (“Aren’t You Rather”..., 19).[1] Eva Figes too, whilst adamant that “a good writer is not ‘experimental’,” admits that “there are experimental stages, certainly, but you do not commit yourself to print until you know you have got where you wanted to get” (“The Interior Landscape”). In such comments we see how, in order to achieve the results that these writers’ published works create, there will often be a number of “failed” routes which are taken up, tested, and abandoned. These preparations are clearly identified as the real “experimental writing” and, perhaps under this understanding, the attribution of the label to the final work is taken to mean that the

piece appears unfinished.

Viewing “experiments” as part of a process of moving forwards and improving a project through trial and error is also how those who saw the label as positive sought to frame it. Charles Marowitz, “experimental” theatre director and collaborator with Alan Burns, described the process as “a permanent group of actors conducting the experiment... Experiment, either in science or art, is predicated on continuity” (Schiele, 104). Theatre, unlike novel writing, presents an even stronger case for viewing the “experimental” as holding a historical role in the development of cultural tradition. The implication that each “experimental” novel contributes to the progression of the literary corpus – a rather ephemeral metaphor for cultural production – is more palpably demonstrated by a series of actors improving a show in each performance by testing and adapting material for best effect. The implications of a culture gradually developing through experiment – a kind of “relay race” to use Johnson’s terminology – would also explain how the very idea of “experimental writing” could elicit such strong feelings either for or against. If the most dynamic literature, the most historically relevant, is tied to whether or not it is “experimental” then what is considered to be so effectively becomes the subject of history. From this perspective it is clear to see why Christine Brooke-Rose, in defending her legacy in an interview with Tom Boncza-Tomaszewski, would say that “B.S. Johnson did a great deal to defend experimental writing but in my opinion... he was not an experimental writer. His stories belong to the then fashionable drab social-realism” (28). The implication - that Johnson was part of a passing fad – is clearly not one that Brooke-Rose would like to see applied to herself in the eyes of posterity.

Both positive and negative responses to the question of exactly who and what constitutes “experimental literature” equally have their share of ambiguities, broad brushstrokes, and jostling over the “canon”. In the midst of these debates, who is right about what “experimental literature” actually is is more uncertain than ever. A more productive way of engaging with the term and the writers it was applied to may be to look at the historical context. Why does this term come to prominence in the 1960s, for instance? A closer look at the Sixties themselves may help us to understand why this conception of “experimental” writing emerged at this point. Fredric Jameson, in dealing with the French *nouveau roman* (of which the British “experimental writers” were often considered a pale imitation), takes the dramatic change in content and form to indicate how “reading undergoes a remarkable specialisation and, very much like older handicraft activity at the onset of the industrial revolution, is dissociated into a variety of distinct processes according to the general law of the division of labour” (*Postmodernism*, 140). On the cusp of postmodernity, the novel reflects the rest of society in its increasing fragmentation, uncertainty and technologically-derived social chaos. This cultural materialist observation is in many ways applicable, although a closer look into the specific conditions of Britain in the Sixties will help us to view such assertions in a clearer focus.

1.1.2: Science and the Sixties

In terms of what constitutes “the Sixties” chronologically, the most suitable interpretation for our purposes is Arthur Marwick’s definition from *The Sixties*; one which ends in 1973 or 74. “Just as [Eric] Hobsbawm has a ‘short twentieth century’”, he writes, “I am postulating a ‘long sixties’... This terminal date pretty well coincides with the one chosen by Hobsbawm for the ending of his ‘Golden Age’” (7). These dates are initially useful as all of the writers covered in this thesis wrote increasingly non-traditional works as the 1960s progressed and stopped writing them (for numerous reasons to be later elaborated) around 1973-74. It also, however, traces the rise of “experimental literature’s” usage as a term to its climax as seen in Fig.1 (293) alongside a period of economic growth, technological development and expansion of the state sector in the interests of democratic socialism. It will be seen how all of these factors contribute to British “experimental” writing, and these writers in particular, in various ways. Concerning the term “experimental”, however, the most notable aspect of the post-war settlement’s ideological commitments was a firm belief in the potential of science.

One of the most famous political speeches of the era quite neatly summarises the extent to which scientifically-tinged language was invested with power, hope and confidence. Reported in *The Times* 2nd October 1963, Harold Wilson’s “White Heat” speech promised a scientific revolution,

but that Revolution cannot become a reality unless we are prepared to make far-reaching changes in economic and social attitudes which permeate our whole system of society. The Britain which is going to be forged in the white heat of this revolution will be no place for restrictive practices or for outdated methods on either side of industry.

The country was set for dynamic change which would overhaul society, removing the old restrictions “on either side of industry” and replacing the old traditions of Establishment and working class alike with a mixed economy. The “scientific revolution” could replace class-interest with objectivity, the old and irrational with the young and dynamic, reactionary and laissez faire attitudes with a scientifically “managed” society.

The “scientific revolution” as a concept alive within post-war consensus Britain took on an ideological role across society, albeit in various ways. Dominic Sandbrook, who has used *White Heat* as title for his history of the era, unpacks how British science was in itself “enjoying something of a thirty-year golden age”; “The mobilisation of science to fight the Nazis had produced plenty of impressive benefits in peacetime [and] British science consistently earned international renown... for anyone interested in science, these were exciting times” (43). Yet it was not only within abstract science, but across an increasingly technologically-equipped society that scientific advance was felt. Richard Hoggart’s study of the working class of the 1950s describes the dawning of the “progressive” outlook which such advance generated:

‘progressivism’ holds out an infinite perspective of increasingly ‘good times’ – Technicolor TV, all-smelling, all-touching, all-tasting TV. ‘Progressivism’ usually starts as a ‘progressivism’ of things, but cannot stay there; it ineluctably spreads beyond things, by dubious analogies (190).

The war was long over, austerity was finally over, and now the appearance of luxury goods in homes of all classes around the country that were derived from new technology served to bring together a whole series of improvements under a catch-all respect for “science”. The folk-

memory of the sixties as a time of “permissiveness” appears here as “progressiveness”; society moving forwards through “experiments in living”. A comparison between how often the Swinging Sixties stereotype “groovy” appeared in print compared to “Space Age” (Fig.2, 293) illustrates how, for the mainstream of society at least, the Sixties were an era of scientific rather than psychedelic marvel.[2]

Within the world of cultural criticism too the awareness of science and technology as a potentially revolutionary force was not overlooked. Denys Thompson introduced his edited 1965 collection *Discrimination and Popular Culture* with the need for academics to address the “gifts of applied science to very large numbers of people[;] more leisure, more energy to enjoy it, and a much greater spending power” (9). The collection itself, with essay titles like “Radio and Television”, “Magazines”, “Recorded Music”, is as much a testimony to the academic’s desire to engage with these new mediums in a way never before attempted as the title – “discrimination” – betrays a more traditionalist elitism. Such elitism, however, is equally illustrative of how the “managed economy” envisioned the role of the state. Raymond Williams, who’s 1962 *Britain in the Sixties: Communications* is another illustrative work of proto-“media studies”, complains of Sir Robert Fraser’s claim that ITV represented “the old system of monopoly in Britain [being] carried away by a wave of democratic thought and feeling” (89) and instead promoted state control of all communication networks and the institution of democratic means of managing them. The people, rather than private enterprise or a centralised state apparatus, should dictate programme making. In America where talk of “socialism”, democratic or not, was taboo, media-studies innovator Marshall McLuhan was so popular that “IBM, General Electric, Bell Telephone, and others had been flying [him] from Toronto to New York, Pittsburgh, all over the place, to give private talks to their hierarchs” (Wolfe, 139). Those in power knew that the world was changing on account of science and technology, and they were becoming yet more aware of how human beings, whether as consumers or democratic subjects, were changing along with it.

It is against this backdrop of science-related optimism that we can return to the scientifically loaded term “experimental literature”. Writing from Paris about the “Nouveau Roman” a year after the events of May ’68 (the relevance of which is dealt with in chapter Six), Christine Brooke-Rose talks of how experimental writing is “introducing us, clearly and simply, to the twentieth century scientific and documentary revolution on the one hand, and to the philosophic revolution on the other” (881). The only one of the British “experimental” writers to really embrace the term, Brooke-Rose nevertheless speaks with a voice recognisable across the group when she describes

the twentieth century crisis in communication, deriving ultimately from the revolution in physics, the breakthrough to a non-Aristotelian, non-Euclidean way of thinking, which has indirectly affected semantics, philosophy and the arts. Only the novel lags behind (881).

Although the term “experimental” may itself be rejected by the writers of the Sixties, the concern for creating a writing that fitted with the scientific era, a “revolutionary” era, was paramount. Like most science-to-art metaphors, and especially determinist ones, the idea of a “non-Euclidean” novel is an easy one to deride as hokum. However, when surrounded by a society ideologically committed to science as an engine for social and moral progression – a means of clearing away redundant traditions and the weight of the past – it is

particularly fitting that the debate surrounding non-traditional novel forms is phrased in a scientific vocabulary. How better to determine the right novel for the Space Age than through experiments?

1.1.3: Groupings, Movements, Contemporaries

So, who were these “experimental” novelists and why are these writers in particular of interest to this study? There will always be difficulties in ascribing “group” status to figures in the recent past and especially for the purposes of a literary study. Unless the group is as self-consciously formed as the Imagists, to take one example, then valid arguments over inclusions, exclusions, the group’s “meaning” and the validity of the grouping status itself will constantly recur. Francis Booth, in his attempt to address such a problem of whom exactly constituted “British Experimental Novelists” did so with a list of thirteen writers who were definitely “experimental” and twelve who were “fellow travellers”. The list includes older figures like Nicholas Moseley and Rayner Heppenstall as well as countercultural figures like Alexander Trocchi and Jeff Nuttall alongside the five writers selected for this study. Booth describes how “from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s there was a focus on the future of the novel and experimental writing in conferences, symposia and anthologies” (586) of which the many recurring figures formed a makeshift “grouping”. Due to Booth’s breadth of scope, however, the resulting picture remains fragmentary, its mode of presentation that of an encyclopaedia, as pre-war modernists, high postmodernists, professors and criminals jostle for position within the same grouping. In order to avoid this dissipating effect, this study concentrates on five writers who moved in the same social and professional circles, and – more importantly – shared an approach to literature which they each professed in different, yet ultimately mutually supporting terms.

What these writers – Ann Quin, Alan Burns, Eva Figes, B.S. Johnson, and Christine Brooke-Rose – form then, is rather a set of very close associates of comparable age and experience who write within the wider context of “experimental literature” and the greater artistic and social currents of the Sixties in general. Thanks to newly available archive materials, a picture of how closely linked these writers are can now emerge. In spite of differing writing styles and approaches to culture, these writers saw themselves as holding a shared set of literary ambitions. The differences in each writer’s expression of that mission is what lends the group its fascinating diversity, yet it is perhaps also why no previous academic study has attempted to define shared “experimental” qualities. Hopefully, an understanding of these qualities will allow further research into those other writers such as Maureen Duffy and Zulfikar Ghose who receive an undue lack of attention within this study. John Calder, publisher of Burns, Quin, and one of Figes’ books (of which more in section 2.3 and chapter 3) compared the core of this group – those studied here - to the 1950s “movement” (Wain, Amis, Larkin, at al.) which he saw as “very English and inward-looking... very Oxbridge and middle class” whereas “my group came from the newly-educated upward-thrusting working class or lower middle. Burns had the personality to lead a new group, but not the staying-power... so, as a new school, it failed” (277). Whether the rigidity imposed by a “school” outlook would have benefitted the writers remains to be seen, although the class-conscious and progressive “continental” outlooks they shared and the tightness of the circle in which shared opinions were expressed and developed mark these writers out as perhaps far more

interesting than an exclusive, elite movement in terms of the Sixties context.

Christine Brooke-Rose, slightly older and so (importantly, considering chapters Three and Six) not a child during the war, would be on the periphery of such a grouping. Less active within the shared social milieu, more willing to “declare herself unimpressed” (Coe, 22) by other writers’ works, and far more attracted to the French *nouveau romanciers* than any British “equivalent” to the extent that she emigrated to Paris in 1968; Brooke-Rose represents a writer uncomfortable in the “experimental literature” scene of the Sixties who nevertheless produced some of its best novels and, unlike the others, made the successful transition into high-postmodernism in the 1980s to hold her own alongside Umberto Eco and Jean-Jacques Lecercle. For Brooke-Rose, “women writers do not like new ‘movements’ and still shrink from declaring all over the place how revolutionary they are. Political women, and hence feminists, have this courage [but] it seems to me that the combination of woman + artist + experimental means too much work and heartbreak and isolation” (*Stories, Theories and Things*, 262). Writing that statement from 1991, it will be seen that Brooke-Rose was nevertheless central to what was being considered “experimental literature” as a trope during the Sixties.

The influence of more formal “groupings” upon the writers certainly existed but, like the group itself, tends to appear as a very mixed assortment – different through the eyes of each person. B.S. Johnson, although praising “Robbe-Grillet’s theory, which I find very convincing (that is, SNAPSHOTS and TOWARDS THE NEW NOVEL)[sic]” in a letter to Zulfikar Ghose dated 26/12/1971, nevertheless describes his novels as “arid and unreadable”, recommending Beckett, Joyce and Nabokov to Ghose’s students instead. Alan Burns, submitting a self-written bio for Calder and Boyars to use, states that “his [own] work is influenced by French and German surrealism”. Meanwhile, Ann Quin’s numerous journeys to the United States result in an American-influenced *Tripticks* and Eva Figes’ husband John was friends with many of the German Gruppe 47 (letter, 1/3/67). As far as tracing influences, one could find connections to almost any western “experimental” contemporary somewhere within the group. Taken as a symptom of Sixties mass communications, however, such cross-continental influences are perhaps not surprising. What is surprising is rather that the British “experimental” novelists retain a distinct and unique identity which doesn’t seek to emulate the approaches meeting with high praise abroad.

As Alan Burns said in an interview with Jonathan Coe, the group, at least as concerned B.S. Johnson, were not so much “his friends... that’s not quite the way to put it. He didn’t fight for the writing of people he knew because they were his friends, but maybe they were his friends because he loved the work, rather than the other way around” (398). Johnson certainly championed those close to him in a manner one would associate with a “movement”, going as far as to list those of his contemporaries “writing as though it mattered” (29), in his essay “Aren’t You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?”, amongst whom are all the other writers in this thesis alongside Samuel Beckett, Angela Carter and Anthony Burgess. Looking into the personal archives of these writers one is struck by a sense of how such a mutual admiration for each other’s work draws them all together, sometimes in spite of considerable personal differences. On a list that Ann Quin kept of recommended books, between the likes of Ibsen, Tennyson, Milton, and Sophocles, she places Alan Burns’ *Europe After the Rain* as almost the only contemporary novel (“list”).

Quin and Burns held a shared party for the publication of *Tripticks* and *Dreamerika!*, hosted by Calder and Boyars, to which B.S. Johnson was warmly invited well in advance (“Invitation”). Johnson was reportedly “permanently in awe” (Coe, 307) of Burns, and worked with him on a couple of short films amongst other endeavours. Johnson was also equally glowing in letters to Eva Figs – at one point signing himself *B* after reading her novel and clearly identifying with the “fat” genius-writer character; “I usually sign myself – but not this time!”. Alongside this mutual respect there was a shared conviction of the novel’s importance as a form and a vital sense of urgency about bringing the form into the modern era. They could become quite vocal upon such subjects, Ghose at one point early on suggesting to Johnson, “I think if we are having a reading it would be best if we didn’t make any speeches about ways of reading and just stuck to reading” (letter, 3/10/60).[3] In spite of lacking any manifesto or shared techniques, the group nevertheless held the development of the novel form as a common cause; a cause trumpeted with all the conviction of the original military units from which we derive “avant garde”.

1.1.4: Against the Nineteenth Century Novel

In order to move beyond the traditional novel form, or at least to move those traditions forward, the “experimental” writers needed a standard against which their non-traditional forms and innovation could be measured. The great bugbear that takes this role within their critical writing and personal conversations is the “Nineteenth Century Novel”. For Brooke-Rose, “the great Nineteenth Century Novel has continued, in both diluted and revived forms, right through the Twentieth, but it has for a long time shown signs of exhaustion in its turn” (*A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, 386). A clear indicator of this exhaustion is seen in how “stories have escaped into new media, film and its younger, as yet babbling offspring, television” (386). For Johnson, the end of the Nineteenth Century Novel was symbolised by James Joyce opening Dublin’s first cinema. The job of storytelling was then passed on to the visual medium, allowing the novel form to “evolve” into something more and “for practical purposes where Joyce left off should ever since have been regarded as the starting point” (“Aren’t You...”, 13). The “experimental” novel is rather the truest form of the novel; a novel which aims to advance the form itself into a mode more suitable to the modern era. Against the stable realism of Nineteenth Century content and the thick, linear tomes of Nineteenth Century form, the short, fragmentary and cliché-free modern novel would emerge as the truest expression of the Space Age. Equally, the “Victorian” social ideology implied by the Nineteenth Century Novel represents a particularly British form of tradition; the argument against which similarly lends British experimental writing a unique set of targets to that of other nations.[4]

Like the ideological usage of science and technology which existed during the popular discourse of the Sixties, the rejection of the Nineteenth Century Novel had both a practical and a moral aspect. The practical case is argued by Zulfikar Ghose in a draft review of Johnson’s *Travelling People* sent to him in 1963, “about four thousand novels are published in Britain every year and during the course of the year, the novel form suffers some four thousand deaths. It is the task of the serious novelist to revitalise the form...and thus to re-establish [its] worth... by demonstrating its historical progress”. Within the tide of mediocre ephemera only a novel which is different will be recognisable

as a distinct work. In creating this novel for the modern era, Eva Figes often wrote about using a “different grid”, that is, a form totally different to that of the Nineteenth Century Novel which could represent “new models of reality” from the moment of its conception and, from this new point, can only be further constructed “by a painful process of trial and error” (“Note”, 114). The “experimental” is part of a historical process of improvement in a way that past forms cannot be. The novelty value that such an approach to novel writing creates can be seen at times to overtake the work itself. B.S. Johnson, speaking to Alan Burns of his cut-up novel *Babel* says how “I’m glad you wrote it because it saved me having to do so” (*The Imagination on Trial*, 92), as if there was a necessity to the work beyond its own value as a self-contained novel. Later Brooke-Rose, in a rather more blasé approach to practical “experiments” wrote to her publisher to inform him that she had not used personal pronouns within her “anti-biography” *Remake* and although “it will be invisible, like my other constraints... you can add it to the blurb if you like” (4/10/96).[5] A break from the Nineteenth Century Novel form is a success in itself, a reason for a novel to be celebrated, even if the purpose for its use may not have been entirely achieved in the final result.

The commitment to practically altering the Nineteenth Century Novel form, however, is also at the heart of the “experimental” Sixties writers’ progressive project against “old” political ideology. The Victorian novel portrays the world of the Victorians and, as such, imbues certain Victorian values as an inevitable result of its traditional structure. For Johnson,

The novelist cannot legitimately or successfully embody present-day reality in exhausted forms. If he is serious, he will be making a statement which attempts to change society towards a condition he conceives to be better, and he will be making at least implicitly a statement of faith in the evolution of the form in which he is working (“Arent’ You...”, 16).

The two aspects, political progress and novel form, are inseparable. Figes’ “grid” shares this implicit set of values combined within a single idea – “the old modes seem hopelessly inadequate” (“Note”, 113) – and goes as far in one essay as to present the writers of Nineteenth Century Novels as conscious reactionaries in this sense for assuming that “you can’t put new wine into old bottles, that you can formulate a new idea in an old form, or that a well-worn cliché can be an eternal verity” (“The Interior Landscape”). Indeed, in looking back at her experiences with the group from 1985, Figes describes how, although B.S. Johnson had the habit of taking the aspect of

truth-telling too literally... he was being consistent in his own way to a belief that Ann, Alan and I all shared with him: the belief that the seamless ‘realist’ novel is not only not realistic, but a downright lie. Of course all fiction is a form of lying, but the realist novel is a dangerous lie because people have come to believe it (“B.S. Johnson”, 71).

Like the post-war outlook of “progressive” politics and a movement towards a more advanced society, the “experimental” writers had an ideological commitment to radical structural change conceptualised in such a manner that to talk of aesthetics and politics, the novel and society, as separate entities was not only to misunderstand the fundamental importance of such a unity but to stand in the way of that progress and to react against it by default.

1.1.5: The Technological Context

The context of the Sixties is not only important in an ideological fashion when considering the “experimental” novelists’ conviction to create new forms for the modern age but contemporary material conditions are also of vital importance when it comes to understanding what forms these “new novels” and “literary experiments” would take. The publishing industry, for example, was producing more novels than ever before and was continuing to grow. From a yearly production of around 6,000 new titles in the year 1901, post-war publishing reached a boom of 20,000 in 1955 and continued slowly to increase from there (Williams, *Britain...*, 23). Yet, unlike France (where 13 per cent of the population buys 75 per cent of the books) (Birch), Britain’s main means of accessing novels was through the public library system. The state expenditure on this system doubled between 1960 and 1968, with 30 per cent of Britons registered as borrowers by 1970 (Birch). Every year the libraries made around 450 million book loans which at that time equated to “rather more than fifteen books a year per head of population” (Williams, *Britain...*, 23). Commenting upon 1962 surveys, Williams states that the “actual book reading public seems to be nearly sixty percent” (23), suggesting not only a highly literate nation but also one to which novel reading remained a popular entertainment activity. Booth observes that alongside Calder and Boyars and Maurice Girodias of Olympia Press (publishers famously willing to publish “experimental” works) “companies like Allison and Busby, Faber and Faber, and Hutchinson New Authors Ltd were open to interesting new work” (587). This could partly be explained by the grand scale of the reading public available at whom to market their wares. Profitable businesses could hedge risky, but potentially award-winning investments against profit making bestsellers (Calder himself published nineteen Nobel Prize winners). The stability granted by securing contracts with state-funded libraries would also allow publishers an increased confidence when it came to future investments.

The increase in other forms of entertainment through adoption of new media could also be seen as having a considerable effect upon how many “experimental” novels went to press, in spite of the protests of the writers themselves. The advent of television was in fact far more disastrous to cinema than it was to the written word. From a 1945 figure of 1,585 million, cinema admissions had fallen to 501 million by 1960, and 193 million by 1970 (Seymore-Ure). In comparison, television ownership had gone from only 2% of households in 1950 to a saturation point of over 90% by 1973. The television “replaced” cinema as an entertainment activity, although whether the effect upon its form was quite as clear-cut is unclear. As Raymond Williams describes in his essay “Culture and Technology”, “a technical innovation as such has comparatively little social significance. It is only when it is selected for investment towards production, and when it is consciously developed for particular social uses... that the general significance begins” (120). The development of cinema as an art form may make the Nineteenth Century Novel obsolete for B.S. Johnson, but for the novel reading public the novel appears more relevant than ever, if only due to a greater numerical and economical availability. Does this “mass culture” erode the “discrimination” prized by commentators like Denys Thompson though? From the perspective of production it would seem that larger readerships would on the contrary encourage a larger number of readers willing to engage with unconventional material. In terms of how capable a national readership would be in interpreting literary innovation, one could also argue that the way in which mass communications present narratives in such great quantity changes them from a singular

event into a general activity. One “watches” television as a distraction, a form of relaxation, whilst one “watches” a film at the cinema as an occasion. The great popularity of soap operas represents a vast consumption of “traditional” narrative, the subversion and alteration of which by “experimental” forms becomes more readily comprehensible by a large audience. Pop music, magazines, the cult of celebrity, “lifestyle” marketing, and broadcast news all demonstrate increasing awareness and development of narrative convention through the Sixties – it is not simply limited to novels, television dramas, operas, theatre, and films as “creative pieces”.

In tandem with the increase in the British public’s novel reading and the publishers’ rate of publication came technological improvements which revolutionised the printing industry. Improvements in materials made paper cheaper and more readily available and the quality of paperback books improved such that, unlike their 1930s “invention” as cheap alternatives to hardbacks, many paperbacks were being presented as desirable commodities in their own right. Offset litho printing, invented in the 1950s, made possible the kind of small, cheap print runs which allowed an alternative “underground” press to catalyse youth and radical culture from 1966 to 1974 (to use Nigel Fountain’s dates) as well as driving down costs generally. By the end of the Sixties phototypesetting devices were also becoming economically accessible to the small printer which replaced “hot metal” printing with a method both of higher quality and of greater adaptability. When we consider pages from Burns’ 1972 *Dreamerika!* (Fig. 3, 294) and Brooke-Rose’s 1975 *Thru* (Fig.4, 295) next to Johnson’s 1964 *Albert Angelo* (Fig.5, 296), the increasing typographical innovation on the graphic surface is showing us not only a growing complexity of composition but a far greater ability to translate such graphic devices into print. When the “experimental” writers talk about writing at the cutting edge of a technological era, they very much have in mind the kinds of technology that would allow them to “do something new” with the novel as a physical book. In a letter to Johnson, Burns swoons over the quality of the book Johnson sent him; “a superb edition of HOUSE MOTHER NORMAL. The book is good to have: paper, binding, colours – beautiful production” (25/5/71). Faced with the exciting possibilities made available by print technology in the Sixties, the dreaded Nineteenth Century Novel appears not only outdated in content but hopelessly unoriginal in its physical construction too.

As with the idea of novelty embedded within “experimental literature” as a term, it is again important to stress the extent to which these writers invested themselves within the project of the “modern novel” not only by making occasional alterations here and there, but by placing innovative practice central to their aesthetic and narrative projects. As Glyn White writes, “it is crucial to our understanding of all his graphic manoeuvring that Johnson does not recognise the artifice of the book as a pattern or a falsification; the technological fact of the book is a given” (113). Whilst reading a B.S. Johnson book, as with many other “experimental” texts that utilise graphic devices, the reader is involved in interpreting the object itself as well as the words contained therein. As well as allowing particular devices to create stirring effects impossible within traditional forms, the additional level of aesthetic experience perpetuates a general aesthetic shift of experience in which a reader, as the possessor of an aesthetic commodity, comes to appreciate the object itself. Once the novel is appreciated as an object then the notion of capturing that object in another medium becomes an impossibility. In this sense the “experimental” novelists’ claims to celebrate the novel as a unique medium are vindicated.

At its most polemical, the aesthetic appreciation of the book as a technological object took on the same utopian gleam that Harold Wilson relied upon for the success of his “White Heat” speech. Rayner Heppenstall, an “experimental” novelist of an older generation who shared many of the younger group’s social circles, describes the 1971 Bedford Square Bookbang in which a tent including himself and Eva Figes listened intently to Alan Burns speaking about how he “looked forward with enthusiasm to the day when novels would be written by computers” (*The Master Eccentric*, 70).[6] Peculiar as it sounded, he was at that time working on just such a “computer program” to go in his (ultimately unpublished) theoretical monograph *Accident in Art*. After describing how the “7090 IBM in Paris” was “calculating” a series of six sound structures to create aleatoric music, he predicts that

simple epigrammatic statements probably still constitute the computer’s most beguiling productions – and for anyone who’d like to have a shot at producing some, but can’t scrape up half a million pounds for a computer, there is heartening news... you can manage very nicely with dice – indeed with a single die (19)

This is followed by a series of instructions for creating “computer poetry” and a number of examples of what the results may look like. The development of this particularly Sixties approach to writing is further investigated in chapter 4, yet for all its considerable idiosyncrasy, Burns contains within this plan all the enthusiasms, convictions and progressive outlooks of these “experimental” writers. Not only is this writing making use of modern technology to develop accessible works for the contemporary reader, in “making havoc of the classification system on which the regime is established” (35) it places the reader “in the very bowels of political changes” (36). These political changes take place against a very distinct backdrop, one specific to the British Sixties in its particular expression, that being a fight against the power which is embodied in “The Establishment”.

1.1.6: “The Establishment”

Speaking to Melanie Seddon of her time in the Sixties with Johnson, Figes, Brooke-Rose and others, Maureen Duffy described how “we were absolutely trying to do something different as a group... we were the first generation of free secondary education and probably the first in our families ever to go to university. I think that fuels the class based interest in my work and others of that time”. The class aspects of these writers are dealt with in this study most in-depth in chapter 2 concerning B.S. Johnson. However, each writer brings their own share of “Otherness” to the traditionally privileged male world of avant garde writing. Quin, like Johnson, was working class although, unlike Johnson, did not manage to gain a university place (in spite of applying for one prior to her suicide (*Between the Words*, 251)). Figes and Brooke-Rose both came from immigrant backgrounds; chapter 3 dealing partly with how being a German Jewish émigré during the Second World War impacts upon Figes’ writing, whilst Brooke-Rose’s move to Paris researched for chapter 6 is in many ways a return “home”. Alan Burns, a barrister-turned-anarchist, represents the most consciously political of the group – his trajectory perhaps moving in the opposite direction. As a group it could be argued that these writers represent the first (perhaps only) time in British history when the majority of professional avant garde writers have not been ubiquitously British, male, and comfortably middle class.

To return to the Duffy quotation, however, it is clear that the kinds of class politics the group engaged in was not limited to demographics. Yes, they shared a common background as

children of the post-war Welfare State, but this is rather a beginning than an end point. The questions of authenticity and capturing experience in a legitimate form which are raised continually by these writers are shaped by the “progressive” ideology of the era but they have their roots in life experiences “non-traditional” in terms of the literary canon. As a result, the Sixties “experimental” novelists are placed in the unusual position of being avant garde writers who are often dismissed by critics as being “kitchen sink”, “vulgar”, and other class-laden epithets usually reserved for writers considered “low-brow”. In response, the writers’ own analyses of why critics fail to understand or support their writing can be summarised in two words: “The Establishment”. The term originated with a *Spectator* columnist, Henry Fairlie who began using the term in the very early Sixties “to describe the invisible web of (generally right-wing) power that controls British life more effectively than such public and open institutions as Parliament” (Carpenter, 130). An ngram search of the word (Fig.6, 297) again follows a “long Sixties” trajectory which peaks in 1968 and burns out after 1973. This is not coincidence as, like “experimental literature” and the ideology of the “Space Age”, there appears to capture a particular spirit of Welfare State democratic socialist aspirations. “The Establishment” carries none of the presumed superiority inherent in labels like “the upper classes” or “the elite”; rather it suggests a small-minded and inflexible group who jealously guard their undeserving power from the rest of the non-established people. For the “experimental” writers, criticised for being both pretentious and unrefined, “the Establishment” fitted perfectly with their view of the Nineteenth Century Novel reading critics, both philistine and snobs.

“The literary establishment exists, it is not a mythical Aunt Sally”, writes Eva Figes in her draft essay “The Interior Landcape”. It is a theme she develops in an essay written for *The Guardian* in the same year, 1968, “The Writer’s Dilemma”;

in England nobody really expects writers to have the intellectual calibre of, say, a philosopher or a mathematician; the review columns and the bestseller lists confirm the cosily middlebrow, and people expect novelists and playwrights to entertain, not tax their thinking overmuch.

It is of note that complaints of this nature often emerge as the writer makes political arguments. In the *Guardian*, Figes goes on to compare the mental poverty of the British literary Establishment with the German literati’s embrace of Gunter Grass’ complex, deeply political writing. B.S. Johnson too describes how “only when one has some contact with a continental European tradition of the avant garde does one realise how stultifyingly philistine is the general book culture of this country” (“Aren’t You...”, 29) and that although

the [British] avant garde of even ten years ago is now accepted in music and painting, is the establishment in these arts in some cases... the neo-Dickensian novel not only receives great praise, review space and sales but also acts as a qualification to elevate its authors to chairs at universities. (“Aren’t You”..., 15)

The “establishment” is thus a class-based term first and foremost. One can write to the standard of avant garde movements in other countries but the British “establishment” always recognises itself and promotes itself above others. The stultifying effect of this class prejudice is all the more infuriating as it stands in total opposition to the post-war vision of progress. The progressive outlook is struck by the contradiction between the desire for a scientifically advanced managed economy and the protectionist measures of an “Establishment” who forever reject advance

in favour of a reactionary rear-guard movement.

It is here where we find the group in line with popular Sixties opinion, if only on the level of discourse. Indeed, Harold Wilson himself proudly spoke of how “the Right-wing Establishment has never tried to embrace me or buy me off. That’s probably a compliment. Lady Whatsit or Lord So-and-So haven’t plied me with invitations” (*Daily Express*, 8/11/62). Once in office Wilson continued to project an albeit tame version of an anti-Establishment image; appearing with the Beatles, smoking a pipe rather than a cigar, and neglecting to adopt an Oxbridge accent. It is on the rather superficial level of accent that Britain’s post-war anti-Establishment middle class appeared to pride itself the most. Tom Wolfe described a “new breed” in 1968; where “the American has always gone English in order to endow himself with the mystique of the English upper classes. The Englishman today goes American, becomes a Mid-Atlantic Man, to achieve the opposite... going classless” (46). Philip Abrams, contributing the “Radio and Television” section to Denys Thompson’s collection, also notices this “startling obliteration of personality for the sake of maximum acceptability” which “forced” BBC announcers into the “mid-atlantic” mode of presentation, “justified, before the Pilkington Committee, in terms of an ideal of cultural democracy” (54). Although unlikely that any of the “experimental” writers would have agreed that a change of accents represented the final overthrow of the British class system, that the general sensibility conformed with theirs in its conceptual synthesis of modernisation with social democracy is testimony to the power of “the Establishment” as an idea to revolt against.

Another useful aspect of the term “Establishment” as the chosen target for Sixties ire was its flexibility. Unlike the specific economic term “bourgeoisie”, or even the popularly used term “middle class” (or “upper middle class”), “The Establishment” could be adopted by almost anyone who felt that a “properly meritocratic” system would reward them more than the current system. Rayner Heppenstall, a fairly close associate with the group – especially of B.S. Johnson – could happily take on the anti-Establishment mantle in spite of being a long-established “experimental” writer, producer of the BBC’s Third Programme, often racist and outspokenly sceptical of the younger writers’ political aims. “I could have done the proletarian stunt as well as the next man and was somewhat tempted to do it during the pink decade before the war,” he wrote in his diary, May 1971, “if I were younger, I might be tempted now, for we seem to be in for another pink decade, and working class backgrounds are in great demand among writers” (*The Master Eccentric*, 69). One could perhaps put the right-wing Heppenstall’s anti-Establishment sympathies down to proximity to the younger writers and their shared anti-philistine sentiments. Either way, the elements of authenticity and commitment that Heppenstall’s jibe at “the proletarian stunt” seeks to undermine are the elements at the heart of the “experimental” writers as a Sixties phenomenon. In order to fully understand this it is not enough to simply identify what they were for and against, they must be located within their historical conditions that the group’s full significance can be understood.

1.2.1: Post-war Prosperity

Much like the writers themselves, the Sixties as a boom period finds its genesis in the Second World War. The “post-war consensus” between Labour and Conservative governments was a commitment to Keynesian economics in the form of the Welfare State. With considerable post-war working class support, the Labour Party’s institution of mass nationalisation with the aim of moving towards full socialism petered out into a philosophy of the “mixed economy” as a modern, technological means of avoiding capitalist crisis without the need for the dreaded Communism. A “managed economy” promoted strong unions to manage workforces and strong regulations to manage private enterprise; a methodical balancing of the two would, theoretically, maintain high demand, reduce poverty, increase democracy, and promote growth. Alongside the much-vaunted full employment of the Sixties, David Harvey also marks out “suburbanisation... , urban renewal, geographical expansion of transport and communications systems, and infrastructural development... co-ordinated by way of interlinked financial centres” (*Condition of...*, 132) as specific sites of Sixties economic success.

In order to demonstrate the relative effectiveness of this economic policy as a means of “managing” post-war growth; it is worth turning for a moment to hard figures in order to provide a certain amount of evidence for Sixties prosperity – something which many studies either neglect entirely or else claim from second-hand opinions. As a measure of Keynesian national expenditure policy, Lowe’s statistics show that from an initial £5779 million budget expenditure in 1945 (weighted at 58.4% of GDP), the total government expenditure reached £9001 million in 1960 (only amounting to 32.6% of GDP) and, by 1970 (still at only 39.3% of GDP) had increased to £20857 million. Even set against inflation this quadrupling of state expenditure demonstrates a massive commitment to government provision, whilst set against GDP its claim to have grown the economy can also be seen as justified. As well as a hugely increased Welfare State to provide housing, education, health, pensions, and unemployment provision, the working people of Britain also saw considerable improvements to their quality of life through the “managed” economy’s commitment to full employment which, by removing the reserve army of labour, strengthened organised labour’s hand in industrial disputes. As Marwick writes, “weekly wage *rates* rose 25 per cent between 1955 and 1960, and had risen by 88 per cent in 1969. When overtime is taken into account, we find average weekly *earnings* rose 34 per cent between 1955 and 1960, and 130 per cent between 1955 and 1969” (258). The cumulative effect of a growth economy, wage rises and the confidence provided by a “cradle to grave” Welfare State drove a boom in consumer spending considerable enough to kick-start what is now known as “consumer culture”. Meanwhile, as demonstrated in Fig.7 (297) from Lowe (303), wealth accumulation became a possibility for the “bottom” 80% of the country for the first time on record.

A consideration of growth rates across all levels of the economy indicate the extent of the shifts which Britain saw in the Sixties. Mass communications, motorways and access to foreign holidays, “youth culture”, and a tenfold increase in private car ownership (Robinson and Bamford, 284) made the world a smaller place. From Burns and Quin’s travels in America to B.S. Johnson’s numerous holidays in Wales, the geography of Sixties living expanded the scope of the average British citizen’s experience – again alienating them from the “parochial” qualities of the past and the Establishment. The improvements in housing and reduction in the power of

private landlords (the end of the infamous “Rachmanism”, or slum landlords, for example) can be seen represented in Short’s statistics in Fig. 8 (298) and Fig. 9 (298). The ideological importance of these changes, as will be described further in Part 3 of this chapter, lie in the fact that the economic foundations of meritocratic expectation have been laid. Not only does life in the Sixties imply easier movement, but increased stability in the physical form of better quality, more easily available houses and more employment positions available than there are people living in the country. In contrast to the now-ubiquitous view of Sixties architectural modernism as inherently flawed and hubristic, those projects which received adequate funding were sources of great enthusiasm; Johnson himself made a half hour BBC documentary, *The Smithsons on Housing*, singing the praises of Britain’s foremost Brutalist pioneers.[7] Similarly, full employment was resulting in considerable immigration from recently emancipated British colonies which, in spaces like the “Cablestrasse” of B.S. Johnson’s *Albert Angelo*, helped to diversify British culture and expand the horizons of the social imagination. These vast social changes undoubtedly brought their share of upheaval, although subsequent reaction has done much to distort the collective memory, imprinting Sixties developments with the marks of later failures.

This economic overview of the British Sixties as an era is important if we are to place in perspective the relative material hardships that the “experimental” group endured as writers. In spite of constant money worries, a number of them reached a level of income such that they could survive on the proceeds of their writing; Eva Figes through journalism, B.S. Johnson through constant badgering of various publishers and Ann Quin through a willingness to live on the small amounts offered by Arts Council grants. The various state supports which made the Sixties “experimental” novelists financially viable will be expanded upon more within this chapter, although in terms of a general overview it is enough to consider that an environment in which more people had money – money which was going further - meant that the temptation for writers who were not independently wealthy to take up better paid employment is considerably reduced. Remembering the period in a letter to Michael Schmidt on 15/10/96, Christine Brooke-Rose recounts a most likely apocryphal story; “someone at Sheed and Ward told me of an author who sent in a blank typescript, explaining that he had no ribbon, but if the publisher held it up to the light he’d be able to read it”. Perhaps a nostalgic reference to how little Sixties writers could live on, the letters of Burns, Johnson, Ghose, Quin and Figes are nevertheless filled with comments concerning their lack of funds. Such concerns do appear double-edged, however, as – in spite of material stresses – these writers nevertheless managed to survive large periods of the Sixties without recourse to secondary employment.

To return to the notion of “the Establishment”, however, it is important to note that the organisational tendency of post-war economics was almost invariably towards monopolistic, hierarchical and centralised institutions. The boom in literature production described in section 1.1.5 emerged from a chaotic period of post-war publishing described by Steve Holland in *The Mushroom Jungle*. The war brought a huge demand for books at the same time as paper rationing severely limited supply: “periodicals that had previously flourished became shadows of their former glory: newspapers were down to a wispy four or six pages, and hardcover books were a luxury” (12). An explosion of “mushroom” publishers (so called as their fly-by-night business practices and low-quality productions feasted upon wartime conditions like a fungus) diversified the publishing

market, only to finally disappear as the 1956 printer's strike drove the vast majority out of business. On the other end of this strike which marked a move into the formalised, unionised, and centralised printing industry of the Sixties, the publishing industry too became dominated by a handful of large corporations. In newspapers the results were most obvious: "in 1961 seven out of eight copies of all morning papers were controlled by three groups (Beaverbrook, Rothemere, King), while seven out of eight copies of national Sunday papers are controlled by two of these groups (Beaverbrook and King)" (Williams, *Britain in...*, 19). Penguin, Britain's largest paperback publisher had, in 1961, over 3,500 books on its lists which "sold 250 million copies between them [with sales] increasing that number at a rate of 13 million a year" (Holland, 9). With publishing in the hands of so few companies, the sense of an Establishment of literary critics (and publishers promoting their own mutual interests against those of upstart outsiders) finds a certain economic justification. Authors writing reviews of each other's work and the work of their friends at the same newspaper or publishing company was not an uncommon practice.

Writing in the editorial of 1975's *Beyond the Words*, a collection of writing aimed at encapsulating the "experimental" writers at a time when the "movement" was nearing its end, Giles Gordon presents Penguin's *Writing in England Today* (published 1968, edited by Karl Miller) as a symbol of how the mainstream British literary Establishment warps the landscape of contemporary literature to fit its own interests.[8] Against the Penguin collection, his should be "considered an antidote", presenting writing that mattered against a "not merely idiosyncratic [but] perverse" selection which "omitted any writer whose abilities and inclinations were remotely divorced from the, so called, realistic" (11). In many ways, viewing the "experimental" novelists' shared outlook as that of Welfare State writers against the Establishment finds its apotheosis in these David and Goliath statements of Us vs. Them. In other ways, it is against the backdrop of the monopolistic post-war publishing industry that the "experimental" novelists' importance as a group identity comes most clearly into focus.

1.2.2: Calder and Better Books

Writing in 1996's "anti-biography" *Remake*, Christine Brooke-Rose "remembers the publishers' parties in the late fifties and sixties, at first the thrill of being invited at all, then quickly, the disappointment, the fatigue at the smart empty talk", and emphasises her "relief at leaving London literary life. Carefully not joining the Paris equivalent" (49). It is this attitude which separates Brooke-Rose from the other writers identified as the British "experimental" novelist group. In comparison with the withdrawn and solitary Brooke-Rose, the other writers seem to exist in an increasingly intense circle of literary events, political causes, and often both together as the Sixties neared its end. Although it would be inaccurate to prescribe any centre or periphery to such activities, in consideration of the previously discussed literary Establishment it is of note that much of the group's activities involved one publisher: John Calder. Publisher of Burns, Quin, and one of Figs' theoretical works (*Tragedy and Social Evolution*), Calder is better known for his support of Samuel Beckett and bringing William Burroughs and the *nouveau romanciers* to Britain; his willingness to take on "experimental", difficult, and dangerous to publish works making Calder and Boyars (co-run by Marion Boyars) perhaps the only independent publishing company to publish nineteen Nobel laureates.

Heir to a Scottish distilling company, Calder found himself in a secure enough financial position to indulge his passion for literature and liberalism by starting an independent publishing company. In an era when government censorship still dictated the limits of literary taste, Calder positioned himself against legal limits on principle which – like the French pornographer and publisher of Burroughs and Trocchi, Maurice Girodias – also placed him at the cutting edge of “experimental” novel publishing almost by default. Starting out in the 1950s, Calder took on American authors blacklisted under the McCarthyite Smith Act which “by implication convicted people of conspiring to overthrow the American government because of the contents of their books” (*Pursuit*, 88). By the Sixties he was a tireless campaigner for civil liberties, albeit in the rather decadent libertarian fashion of the era; wheeling a naked woman in a wheelbarrow through the Edinburgh literary festival he began in 1962 and flyposting equally naturist posters as adverts around London (“Calder Takes a Civil Liberty”, 135). Paul Harris describes Calder’s role in the publishing world as one of a dying breed of “Gentleman Publishers. They might not have exactly been gentlemen but they were characters, in every sense of the word, utterly devoted to the call of the struggle into print” (119). Calder was one of a small number of the “anti-Establishment” establishment without whose assistance much of the “experimental” works of the Sixties would never have been created.

As a publisher, Calder and Boyars had considerable influence and, as such, could bring together established members of the literary scene who may be sympathetic to the unorthodox work being produced by their authors. A guest list to a 1969 party for Alan Burns included Anthony Burgess, William Burroughs, Magnus Magnusson, Angus Wilson, and Frank Kermode, as well as the usual group and Burns’ other collaborators like Charles Marowitz of the Open Space theatre. Another, earlier party to celebrate the publication of *Europe After the Rain* even featured “television personalities and the Cuban Ambassador” (Calder and Boyars, “Record...”). Burns himself had no qualms about admitting that his “going so far out on a limb [in his writing] was partly made possible by the backing of John Calder” (*Imagination...*, 92) but even Eva Figes, with whom Calder “arranged joint readings and sessions for the public to promote a new kind of English novel” (*Pursuit*, 274) became “personally friendly” with him, despite refusing to let him publish her novels. For Ann Quin, Calder and Boyars became both a financial and emotional support, her letters to her publishers “revealing her to be very anxious about money, demanding, difficult, sporadic, impulsive, and seeking stability” (Dodd) to an extent far more personal than professional in tone.

As well as book publishing, Calder was also one of the first British investors in literary events. Beginning in 1962 with the Traverse Theatre Club to “present serious theatre productions of a type not usually presented for economic reasons” (Marwick, 349), he in the same year launched the Edinburgh literary festival to coincide with the already popular arts festival; the influence of which is recounted in chapter 5. Along with a number of his authors, Calder was also a regular attendee of Better Books, the only place in Britain to regularly hold “happenings”. Recalling one of Jeff Nuttall’s *The People Show* pieces, Calder wrote that “it was a messy affair with pieces of raw organ meat thrown around the room, but the point, which I have forgotten, was well-put-over” (277). Friendly with the owner, who reserved him his own “Calder Corner” for new “experimental” works, he eventually took over the establishment in what Victor Herbert describes as an essentially quixotic business manoeuvre;

[Better Books] was the only London west-end bookshop that held readings and literary activities. It was full of nineteenth century tiny interlocking rooms, cosy for browsing, but in the end, they were the cause of his own demise... everyone in town who was both educated and broke and who needed a few quid knew how easy it was to steal a few books from these tiny rooms. Everyone in London knew this... except John (128-129).

Nevertheless, Better Books became an essential meeting place for both the avant garde cultural scene of the Sixties and the simultaneously occurring, yet only very tangentially linked, countercultural “underground” scene.[9] Alongside Jim Haynes’ Arts Lab on Drury Lane, Better Books was a home for the boom in “experimental” theatre, “happenings” and other physical theatre (Ansorge, 26) in spite of its small spatial allowances. Politically, Better Books also served as Britain’s introduction to the Situationist International in the form of 1965’s February workshops based around Alexander Trocchi’s *Sigma, A Tactical Blueprint*, the closure of which was “widely welcome” due to, amongst other things, “the smell” (Fountain, 14).

If relationships and influences between British Sixties “experimental” writers were to be mapped out, almost all would be connected at some point through Calder. It is a testimony both to Calder and Boyars’ place within the publishing industry and equally to the publishing Establishment’s proportional lack of interest in “experimental” material considering the overall demand for new titles. The closeness of the “experimental” nexus is perhaps another reason for the success of writers from non-privileged backgrounds. Ann Quin, for example, who never formally studied literature to a university level, was nevertheless introduced through Rayner Heppenstall to B.S. Johnson and, after dinner, joined the crowd at Better Books to hear Nathalie Sarraute speak about the *nouveau romancier* theory of the novel (Heppenstall, *The Master Eccentric*, 120). Snapshots of Sixties literary culture such as this demonstrate how, with the right mix of state funding and adventurous publishers, the formerly “elite” world of non-traditional literature could be made available to audiences from all backgrounds, not simply those already “established” through Oxbridge.

1.2.3: The Widening World of Education

Outside of Oxbridge, where most of the “experimental” novelists worked and wrote, the education system was in a state of rapid expansion on an unprecedented scale, creating a whole raft of opportunities for writers of slender means. At the core of this growth was the 1944 Education Act which, combined with Welfare State aims and Keynesian economic backing, led to a surge of funding into education. From an average of 6,000 full-time teachers being trained before the war, the number more than doubled to an average of 14,000 afterward – the demand such that an Emergency Teacher’s Training Scheme had to be put into operation (Cole, 344). As a result the number of teachers in primary education went from 116,820 in 1946 to 144,693 in 1960 and 180,008 in 1970 (Lowe, 216) and in secondary education went from 58,455 in 1946 to 131,591 in 1960 and 171,343 in 1970 (Lowe, 220). The total public expenditure on schools grew in an equally exponential fashion, from £408 million in 1951, to £1,060 million in 1960, to £3,154 million in 1970 (Lowe, 236). During the same period university places increased from 82 thousand to 228 thousand (Lowe, 206), with numerous new institutions and courses opening to more effectively cater for demand.

The explosion in education impacts upon the “experimental” writers in a number of ways.

In macro terms, a more highly educated population will inevitably bring with it an increased market for avant garde culture, especially for the sort of novels which depict a similar non-Oxbridge intellectual sentiment as an increasing number of cultural consumers could relate to. For the writers themselves it meant access to the kinds of circles conducive to literary success: B.S. Johnson editing *Universities Poetry* with Zulfikar Ghose and *Lucifer* with fellow King's College student Maureen Duffy, for example. It meant access for working class writers to literary criticism's conception of the "canon" and the traditions against which they wrote. It meant stipends and awards such as Alan Burns becoming the University of East Anglia's first writer in residence and Johnson becoming the first Gregynog Arts Fellow in the University of Wales. Universities presented spaces for Eva Figes to speak as her political commitment to feminism and women's writing grew. The rapid expansion of educational places also meant that securing a teaching position was also made far easier, with writers like B.S. Johnson and Anthony Burgess falling almost accidentally into positions at high schools (the influence of which I have dealt with in another paper (2011)) and Alan Burns and Christine Brooke-Rose taking up lectureship positions on the invitation of the universities. Burns himself began his working life as part of the Royal Army Education Corps in 1949 (Madden, 110); an experience inspiring his first novel, *Buster*, and his subsequent anarchist politics. The casual attitude to taking on teaching positions can be felt in a letter from Ghose to Johnson on 7th March, 1963 as he asks whether there are "any good teaching jobs? I've just realised that even if I sold the books already out, *and* finished two more novels this year, I still won't have any real income till late next year". That what is now a career profession was considered a stop-gap between writing income demonstrates one of the peculiarities of Sixties plenty perhaps foreign to the twenty-first century reader.

In terms of "The Establishment", however - that functional term for those within British society who have reached a position in which simply by being in that position they are granted access to power, prestige and privilege - the traditional way by which one becomes "established" is through the halls of Oxford and Cambridge universities. Writing in 1965's *Anatomy of Britain Today*, Anthony Sampson described the contemporary position of the universities as so;

Like dukes, Oxford and Cambridge preserve an antique way of life in the midst of the twentieth century, and the dreaming-spires legend is supported by tourists, the Ford Foundation, conventions of chartered accountants and international fame. Oxford and Cambridge in 1961 provided 87 per cent of permanent secretaries, nearly 40 per cent of members of parliament, and 71 per cent of the vice-chancellors of other universities. Eleven members of Harold ["anti-establishment"] Wilson's cabinet were at Oxford... The 18,000 students of Oxbridge make up, from the outside, at least, one of the most elite elites in the world. Less than one per cent of Britain's population go to Oxbridge but, once there, they are wooed by industry and government... you see, they speak the same language. (222)

Although it is not simply the exclusive benefits that accrue around an Oxbridge degree which lend a pallor of social injustice to the two universities' national domination (after all, to a "meritocratic" perspective these privileges would have been earned), it is rather the manner in which the "mixed economy" of state and private schools in Britain tend towards making Oxbridge an engine for the reproduction of an Established ruling class. Fig. 10 (299) from Sampson (196) demonstrates how, from the moment of entering the educational system, a British

post-war child had a certain class-based likelihood of attending Oxbridge already well established. The 1944 Education Act which raised school leaving age to sixteen and massively expanded educational provision did little to change the Oxbridge tendencies, according to Sampson, and “in fact (because of the expansion of places) *more* public school boys are going to Oxbridge than in the thirties” (223). It is against this background of cultural domination that the majority of the experimental writers covered in this thesis wrote.^[10]

It is in the context of such an educational system that much of what has been discussed concerning The Establishment finds its genesis – including the “anti-establishment” feeling prevalent within traditional institutions such as the BBC and parliament.^[11] Eva Figes, contributing to an “Oxford und Cambridge” edition of German periodical *Merian*, writes satirically of a number of unusual aspects of the Oxford experience including the “Oxford accent”:

Until about twenty years ago generally considered the perfect way to speak English, and disseminated to the nation at large via the BBC. This accent was not so much the result of an Oxford education as of the fact that the student body at the University was made up of the sons of England’s aristocracy and wealthy middle class. Since the early fifties it is no longer considered the most desirable way to talk. Writers and dramatists (particularly John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*) made it fashionable to talk with a touch of dialect, to make it quite clear that daddy was a working man. The success of the Beatles and other pop musicians during the sixties has made a Merseyside accent the most fashionable of all, and this is now dominant at the BBC.

The “progressive” post-war attitude is here at work in the heart of what those outside would consider the Establishment. A “classless” accent, with flavours of Wolfe’s “Mid-Atlantic Man”, is only bettered by the “touch of dialect” which acts as a passport to a more legitimate and authentic background of the “working man”. The underlying satirical content of Figes’ piece is the mismatch between the traditional Oxford accent indicating a privileged background and the new dialectical Oxford accent indicating an awareness of what is fashionable, and how both, once dominant at Oxford, inevitably become dominant at the BBC as well. Oxbridge, by aligning itself with liberal attitudes, could happily maintain its hegemony in an “anti-Establishment” climate. In one extreme example of Oxbridge liberalism in action, the drug dealer Howard Marks who studied at Balliol in 1968 was recruited by the Dean “merely to refrain from participation in protests, etc, and persuade the cronies that I would inevitably attract to do likewise [as] the problem was not drugs but left-wing revolution” (67). Policing the fine line between meritocratic apologia and actual criticism was essential for maintaining the “managed economy” at all levels. It is perhaps this subtle policy of Oxford’s to use social permissiveness as a means to maintain the old order – a tolerant Sixties paternalism – that informs so much of what is considered to be radical Sixties culture; especially in cultural bastions dominated by Oxbridge graduates.

1.2.4: Writers and The BBC

The writer who achieved most success with the BBC – an almost exclusively Oxbridge

managed institution - also managed to have the most disagreements with the corporation. A full account of B.S. Johnson's trials and tribulations has been written by Valerie Butler for the collection *Re-reading B.S. Johnson*. "Despite his best efforts to convince them otherwise, the BBC continued to place his work, when they played it at all, in the Third Programme [the most "high cultural" of the three stations] Johnson did not view his work in this way at all" (117). For Johnson, the connection between his writing and "the truth" was such that his work should be considered suitable for a popular audience (a sentiment shared by Eva Figes concerning her radio play *Bedsitter* in 1969), although for the Oxbridge paternalists such a programming decision was inconceivable. The process of disillusion Johnson underwent in his dealings with the BBC can be readily summarised in an angry jotting from his 1959 *Notebook 3* in which, next to the fateful reminder "Write BBC for job" he scrawls "AH HA! – 1971"; the bitter future laughing at the naïve past. In spite of his many disagreements with media outlets, however, Johnson made a number of BBC documentaries as well as working for the Welsh wing of ITV, HTV, on the forty minute film *Fat Man on a Beach*, which was broadcast after his death in 1973 and remains widely remembered. In radio, too, Johnson succeeded in breaking new ground, having his novel *Christy Malry's Own Double-Entry* read twice, from cover to cover, on Radio London – "something of a coup of the kind in which Bryan has specialised", wrote Rayner Heppenstall of it in 1973 (*The Master Eccentric*, 108).

For all of its institutional thinking, the BBC had already been long established by the Sixties as a space for writers to find creative work. Rayner Heppenstall traces the post-war years in his memoir *Portrait of a Professional Man* in which, although "in the public arts, things had looked up greatly after Hitler's war... the writer was still a nobody in this most Philistine of civilised countries... I was not the first, nor was I quite to be the last, writer to whom joining the BBC seemed a possible answer to a recognised dilemma, the crucial financial need for a second job" (83). As his memoir goes on to recount, however, the BBC's "old boy's network" way of operating was increasingly falling foul of the centralising, meritocratising and technologizing demands of the Sixties. The mode of television and radio, only thirty years earlier the kind of exciting new medium in which experiment was called for and high-brow risks were taken, was now falling into recognisable patterns of programme-making and audience expectation. Through clouds of whiskey vapours and cigarette smoke, the dilettante likes of Rayner Heppenstall were evacuated in favour of professional television and radio producers.

The BBC, like Oxbridge, took to liberalising during the Sixties in a similar "touch of dialect" manner, featuring both "anti-Establishment" satirical comedies like *That Was The Week That Was* in the early decade and *Monty Python's Flying Circus* towards the end, and more "kitchen-sink" sitcoms based around working class life such as *Steptoe and Son* and *Till Death Do Us Part* which recognised "the inadequacy of old discourses... even while it embodies them" (White and Mundy, 114). The Director General of the BBC in the Sixties (literally holding the position from 1960 to 1969) was Sir Hugh Greene, the key liberalising force who reputedly "would actually congratulate programme-makers for eliciting 'another letter from [Clean-Up TV campaigner] Mary Whitehouse'" (Ben Thompson, 7). Anthony Sampson described his policy in the sense that "while accepting that the BBC must be impartial between Right and Left, he insists that it cannot be neutral between Right and Wrong" and, as such, was vehemently anti-racist, keen to

undermine elitism where he found it and never “disguised his contempt for ‘the commercial monster’” (650) of independent broadcasting. As with a lot of the paternalist tendencies buried beneath Sixties aspirations of social democracy, however, a willingness to engage with class difference and age difference did not sit comfortably with a desire to create something aesthetically different in the “experimental” sense – especially with a radical message attached. In many ways the BBC’s allocation of material according to whether it was Radio One populist or Third Programme “high-brow” did more to uphold aesthetic distinctions than democratise them.

The tendency of the BBC to create its own traditions was perceptibly noted by Eva Figes in her 1971 article for the *Listener*, “Dreaming”, in which she comments that

During my school days radio meant very much what television means to my children today... Nowadays my listening habits, like most people’s, are very different, but when I glance through *Radio Times* I find it hard to believe that I am now a grown-up woman with children of my own: *Brain of Britain*, *Any Questions*, *Woman’s Hour*, *The Archers*, *Desert Island Disks!*... Please, somebody tell me I’m dreaming. But there is no mistake, and even one of the old [*Twenty Questions*] panel members survives. (531)

Although each of these formats continue to be made and continue to receive a considerable listenership to this day, Figes approaches the subject from the opposite perspective and suggests that BBC radio’s timeless qualities essentially leave the medium entrenched in the past. For a writer whose aesthetic philosophy involved the constant reinvention of form to more accurately capture the cultural and social conditions of the present, the BBC’s unchanging content appears as the broadcast equivalent of the Nineteenth Century Novel: out-dated and reactionary. Typical of British ambivalence towards the BBC, however, Figes’ criticisms nevertheless didn’t discourage her from submitting comedy sketches to *Woman’s Hour*, including a particularly funny one about “Womb Envy” submitted on 21st April, 1969 (Letter to Deborah Rogers).

Calder and Boyars, in spite of attracting the occasional television personality to parties and readings, also had trouble encouraging the BBC to cover “experimental” culture. Calder laments in *Pursuit* of the numerous occasions when readings and Better Books “happenings” would have made entertaining radio had the BBC responded to his requests. Marion Boyars too wrote a half-pleading, half-passive-aggressive request to the BBC that they cover Alan Burns’ “experimental” play *Palach*, produced by Charles Marowitz and the Open Space Theatre, arguing that “French T.V. have been to record some of it and there is vast interest from European countries, but strangely enough none of the British arts programmes were attracted by the voluminous discussion and reviews that the play generated” (22nd November, 1970). Even when BBC policy was firmly in favour of an “anti-Establishment” camp, if such a thing could be said to exist, the “experimental” was still subject to institutional disinterest. The ambiguous nature of “The Establishment” as a term is embodied in such disagreements as to what exactly constitutes the “new” and the “traditional”. Even Christine Brooke-Rose’s fairly conventional attempt at a radio play, “A Séance at the Seminar” (in which academics conjure the poet of *Beowulf* only to end up arguing with him over historical details) was turned down on grounds of “difficulty” (“BBC Radio Play”). As much as the BBC could be

a progressive force in the Sixties when it came to challenging outdated modes and manners, challenging its audience's cultural sensibilities was alien to its ideological framework.

1.2.5: The Arts Council

The most important direct source of funding for the group as writers, outside that gained directly from publishing contracts, came from the greatly expanding Arts Council. Another engine of Welfare State expansion, the Arts Council emerged from the Second World War where, faced by a need for culture and entertainment in the face of a war economy, the first public money was spent on the arts in Britain since the days of court patronage. According to Sir Hugh Willatt's 1971 report on the Arts Councils' "first 25 years", the funding "proved to be startlingly productive of quality. This was the first wartime discovery. The second was the extent and ardour of public response" (3). Elsom's account of the Council's development describes how during "the first ten years [the grants] were small, tied to specific projects" (127), from 1956 to 1964 "grants from the government rose steadily... this period was particularly fruitful and optimistic" (128) and then, following Harold Wilson's appointment of Jennie Lee as Minister for the Arts "whose declared purpose was to extend the role of arts in society" (128), the budget effectively doubled and Britain began its first series of long-term state investments in cultural production. Fig. 11 (300), from Willatt's report indicates how, in terms of percentages, the funding allocated to novelists in general was relatively small. However, unlike theatre or musical productions, the Arts Council grants went direct to the writers and, not usually being attached to specific projects, could happily be spent entirely upon living costs – providing valuable writing time.

Although a sense of "the Establishment" did still exist within the Arts Council (Charles Marowitz staged numerous attacks upon its theatre policies) the writer-led constitution of the literature funding panels meant that the "experimental" novelists were actually in a good position to secure funding, and very often did. B.S. Johnson in particular "had the knack of applying for things and getting them... but equally when *he* served on committees like that he would spend endless time trying to advance the cause of particular writers, [trying to get them] onto the committees, or into the fellowships, or to get the grants" (Coe, 272). These writers especially included "Eva Figes, Alan Burns, Ann Quin, and Giles Gordon" (Coe, 272). An Arts Council grant of £1,200 for Zulfikar Ghose held at the Ransom Centre reads "Your Sponsor for this award was Mr B.S. Johnson"; a common sight for grant recipients which must have improved Johnson's standing considerably. Giles Gordon, American friend of the group, also succeeded in becoming "a member of the Arts Council's Literature Panel during its first four years and was a member of the management committee of the Society of Authors" (Booth, 651). Calder and Boyars' writers did especially well, Calder being able to trade off his eye for Nobel winners against more "mainstream" competition. The Arts Council represents perhaps the quintessential Welfare State support for "experimental" literature during this period: promoting new art as a social good was at the core of these writers' messages, whilst their usual weakness of commercial viability became a positive boon as more commercially successful writers would be judged to have far less need of grant money. The Council even receives a tongue-in-cheek attack from the right-wing protagonist of Ghose and Johnson's unpublished satire, *Prepar-a-Tory*;

A recent publication by the Arts Council has come to my hands, in which I read that the Arts Council receives a state grant equivalent to what it cost to build four miles of the M1 motorway. It just goes to show why we have bad roads (47).

The awards granted to “experimental” writers were many. In 1969 Johnson was awarded a £2,000 grant – “the second he had received in just over two years” (Coe, 270). Alan Burns also received two bursaries, one in 1969 and one in 1973, as well as benefitting from the Arts Council’s funding of the Open Space theatre when Marowitz staged his play *Palach*. Ann Quin was granted a Harkness Fellowship to travel to America, a D.H. Lawrence award and an Arts Council grant which, as it was perceived to have been spent on a two month long transcontinental bender, John Calder blamed for her death (*Pursuit*, 276). Apart from direct Writer’s Bursaries, the Council also used a considerable amount of its funding to promote local projects around the country. Of these, the Greater London Arts Association funded a project co-edited by Johnson and Margaret Drabble called *London Consequences* in 1972 in which writers including Rayner Heppenstall, Melvyn Bragg, Eva Figes, and Alan Burns each received the manuscript, contributed a chapter, and then passed it on to the next writer until completion. In the spirit of Cold War competition, B.S. Johnson and Anthony Burgess went on paid-for trips beyond the iron curtain, to Hungary and Russia respectively. In the second part of his memoirs, *You’ve Had Your Time*, Burgess even talks of receiving British state funding to hold literary parties at his flat (149).

Considering the difficulties that a career in “experimental” literature entailed during the Sixties, both emotional and financial, the Arts Council stands as a recurring beacon of hope within these writers’ careers. Far more than money, the awards meant validation from peers – something more valuable than the opinions of Establishment critics – and once each award is won it can be seen dutifully appearing upon the writers’ “bio” for future appearances in collections or in the press. In Johnson’s 1970 *Notebook 8* there is evidence of how defensive he could be around the subject of the Arts Council. Reading an attack on “bursaried writers” in the *Times Literary Supplement*, he writes, “Attack English lecturers – public money spent on bad ones (none below the efficiency bar) as *TLS* attacked [us]” (50). The extent to which Johnson lashes out here considering that he was usually a defender of state education (even when it did come to his nemeses the English lecturers) is testimony to the lifeline which the Council bursaries represented and how wrapped up they became with social value. A letter by Ann Quin on the 25th October 1969 demonstrates the kind of living standards from which the grants offered respite;

Terrible depressions, almost suicidal at times. Mother thinks it’s ‘the pill’. I put it down partly to lack of money (not able to buy even a bottle of whiskey when I want!) but then the other day heard that I’ll be receiving an Arts Council award of £1,000 – and of course felt pretty high for the day, but that aint stopped the depressions!

1.2.6: Public Politics and Pay Disputes

Although each of the “experimental” writers were committed to a politics of writing in their own respective ways, they also took to political organisation increasingly as the “long Sixties” moved into its later, more turbulent years. By 1973, B.S. Johnson and Alan Burns were collaborating on trade union filmmaking and had both published terrorism-themed, politically divisive novels (the journey to which is more fully described in my paper “Cell of One”(2014)), Eva Figes is an almost full-time political essayist and Christine Brooke-Rose is dealing with the aftermath of May ’68 in her Paris lectureship. In reaching this point however, there are a number of political causes that Burns, Quin, Figes, and Johnson share (Brooke-Rose already having left for Paris) which would appear to cement them as a “group” with shared interests, even if they could not be considered an “aesthetic movement”.

The first of the political groupings which emerged from these writers was Writers Reading: an attempt to bring writers and the public together through discussions and readings of new work. Rayner Heppenstall, attending a meeting at Alan Burns’ house where the group was proposed on 31st July 1969, was himself reticent – “I don’t think it will work” – which led to “Bryan Johnson [seeming] bent on needling me” (*The Master Eccentric*, 26). As a political commitment, Writers Reading can be seen to emerge fairly effortlessly from the pre-existing literary scene surrounding these writers. Johnson would be provided a platform for his speech-making during readings and Burns would more publically commit to his growing “disgust with... Literature which is not life but only marks on paper. Plus a political rejection of bourgeois art as a self-indulgence irrelevant to the struggle for social justice” (“Essay”, 64). Having attended anti-Vietnam protests together in 1968 (a year of dramatic social upheaval across much of the world) the decision to start Writers Reading – for Johnson and Burns at least – may have simply been to make visible the politics already latent within their work at a time when public political commitment and protest shook the country. It may have been for this reason that Johnson had such a problem with Quin’s contribution as Burns describes in Coe’s biography:

At this [Writers Reading] ICA event, we all gave our readings and it was all going in a very jolly way and then Ann Quin’s turn came and she did her Quin thing, that is to say she came onto the stage and just sat there and looked at people, she wouldn’t say a goddamn word! She just stared, she either implied or she actually stated that we sort of ‘think-communicate’... which I was really quite intrigued by, it seemed to be sort of radical and provocative and interesting, whereas Bryan was simply pissed off, he was furious with her. (405)

Differences between Johnson’s Old Left spirit of militant working class stoicism, Burns’ New Left anarchism and Quin’s New Age “happening” (in the style of the contemporary “experimental” theatre boom) are made obvious when placed on the same stage and – considering the “experimental” writers tendency to attack aesthetic choices they disliked – probably contributed to the downfall of the Writers Reading project.

More politically effective than Writers Reading, in that it eventually came into law in 1979, was the campaign for Public Lending Right. Considering the contemporary British reading culture’s allegiance to libraries, this campaign to secure payments for writers when their books were publically lent could make a significant difference to the financially insecure “experimental” writers. The proliferation and popularity of libraries had not gone unnoticed by writers. Elspeth Davie, contributing to *Beyond the Words* writes about standing “outside our main public

library on a Saturday afternoon... fascinated to see the number of people who came striding up, books under their arms, read the CLOSED notice several times with disbelief, and finally turned away looking incredibly gloomy” (88). More politically targeted than the Writers Reading project, the campaign for Public Lending Right drew a much larger group together. Talking of the make-up of this group, however, Maureen Duffy describes how B.S. Johnson again felt left out: “he was involved in the initial campaign for Public Lending Rights, but I think he found it quite difficult that it was basically being run by a coven of women” (Seddon). Compared to the reasoned and patient tones in which Eva Figes writes about the subject, however, Johnson’s sputtering outrage may have come across as overly-abrasive for a political lobbying group anyway. In a letter to Zulfikar Ghose about the matter (quoted by Ghose in “Bryan”), Johnson wrote “bollocks to librarians, too – of all the ponces who feast off the dead body of Literature, the carrion who feast on the corpses of good men, writers, pay us fuck all and go out to lunch every day of the working week... librarians are the worst” (27). As Eva Figes describes the dynamic of political groups with Johnson involved,

Bryan’s stance was always aggressive, even belligerent, whether the cause was modernity in literature or money, his other great obsession. I remember him throwing paper darts into an audience to campaign for Public Lending Right. I remember sitting next to him at a very rowdy and enjoyable Annual General Meeting of the Society of Authors where he called for the instant resignation of the entire Committee of Management because of their handling of the PLR issue (“B.S. Johnson”, 71).

Coe too writes of Johnson’s attack on the Society of Authors, pointing out that it “took place not long after his return from Hungary in 1973” (where he engaged in sufficient political arguments to at one point label himself communist), and that, according to Gordon Williams, the attack was not about handling of Public Lending Right but rather a survey released by the Society “which revealed that writers’ earnings had, on average, dropped substantially since the mid-1960s” (347). Whichever was the reason for the attack, a brief correspondence with Alan Burns indicates the fairly spontaneous nature of the guerrilla action. Burns himself only joined the Society on 1st July (the AGM occurred on the 26th), writing to Johnson and offering, “if you need my help in overthrowing and trampling on the old guard please let me know”. Johnson, seemingly going on a recruitment spree in response, must have been let down to receive Burns’ letter on the 4th:

Dear Bryan, If you’re urging folks to join the Soc of A with a view to them taking part in the AGM it’s worth your knowing that the processing of new members takes so long that those applying after 30th June are excluded....I had a word with Maureen Duffy and she agreed there was naught to be done.

Perhaps due to Johnson’s inability to recruit sufficient insurrectionaries in time, or perhaps due to the brusqueness of his tone in delivering his demand – Gordon Williams describes “not being prepared for the violence of his tone, or for the attacks on individual Committee members to be so personal” (Coe, 347) – the uprising was not a success.

Behind Johnson’s bouts of early 1970s militancy, however, there remain important causes which were fought for by other writers in less direct actions. Eva Figes, whose essay writing was much in demand following the success of *Patriarchal Attitudes* in 1970, contributed a passionate piece to the newly-formed magazine *New Humanist* on “Public Larceny Right” in 1972 which argued that, by refusing to pay writers for the use of their

books, the state was essentially funding a public library system operating against the national cultural interest. The letter to *New Humanist's* editor, Christopher Macy, to which the article was attached, told him to “send copies to the Publisher’s Association, Society of Authors, and the Bookseller’s Association and see what happens”. Her commitment to this cause was such that, by 1978, she even included a plea to readers to support Public Lending Right printed inside her book *Little Eden*, saying that “most people who read my books borrow them freely from public libraries and do not buy copies. As a result, my earnings from them are small and, like most authors, I find it impossible to live on my literary income alone” (5).

Considering that, as we have seen, it is in part due to the post-war economics of Britain that the “experimental” writers could exist as an avant garde whilst materially supporting themselves, the call for a Public Lending Right takes on a totemic quality as the cause behind which post-war writers could rally. As much as the “anti-Establishment” protests that the group engaged in were meaningful in an ideological sense, the campaign for Public Lending Right serves to remind us that the writers themselves were in an uncomfortable financial position. The belief that one could make a sustainable living from novel writing as a profession, however, also demonstrates a certain unique Sixties position. As the democratic socialist post-war society “progressed,” the “experimental” writers bringing novel writing into the modern era believed in fighting their corner in the “managed economy” in the manner of any other profession or industry.

1.2.7: Feminism: A Revolution in Progress

When considering the 1960s as a zenith moment for the “permissive society”, as later moral panics would frame it, there exists a distinct tension in terms of the status of women within such a society. The reforms brought about during the Sixties - the 1967 Abortion Act, 1969 Divorce Reform Act, and the popularisation of the Pill being the most notable examples – can be read as one aspect of the overall “progressive”, technology-driven context of the decade. There is, however, wrapped up in this liberal attitude, a whole series of sentiments which, rather than improve the situation of women, served only to bring to the surface the internal problems of patriarchal discourse as it was internalised by church, state, education, healthcare and the popular imagination. Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) and Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) may have laid the groundwork for the “Second Wave” of feminist politics in the early 1970s, but it was the cumulative experiences of the Sixties which generated the grassroots movements which swept the country. Eva Figes, whose feminist work *Patriarchal Attitudes* (1970) was second only to Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1970) in popularity, is uniquely positioned for a study of post-war developments as concerns the “experimental” novel – as appears in chapter 3 – yet tensions around gender politics are apparent throughout all of the writers’ works. Whether it is B.S. Johnson’s anxiety-ridden chauvinism or Ann Quin’s violent sexual imagery, the feminist cause of the 1970s is prefigured by the contradictions of 1960s “permissiveness” and the terms upon which each writer’s personal struggles to support themselves were waged.

Looking back on the 1960s, feminist scholars have indicated how the technocratic post-war consensus was especially capable of maintaining the “Establishment” as far as gender politics was concerned. Ann Oakley’s 1974 study *Housewife* describes how

although the increase in women in the labour force from 27% in 1939 to 38% in 1974 “certainly represents changes in women’s roles... the extent of the change is often overestimated” (59). Women remained consistently and dramatically underrepresented in government and the professions, whilst the much-vaunted “greater variety in premarital sexual experience was in all probability confined to a relatively small urban and largely college-educated group” (48). For the working classes, Richard Hoggart’s 1950s presentation of a staunchly conservative sexual morality remained the norm. From such a perspective, the “permissive” legislation of the Sixties also takes on a new meaning. As Jane Lewis describes the situation as regards divorce law;

the strands of opinion favouring deregulation that began to make themselves heard in the mid-1960s, whilst apparently reflecting the changes in behaviour, [largely] represented the outcome of a long struggle to reconcile traditional views about marriage... with the implications of the increased use of artificial contraception and changes in the position of women. (50)

While it may have been productive for social conservatives to retroactively frame Sixties liberalisation as a move towards the empowerment of women (especially when faced with the demands of 1970s feminism), many of the changes can be considered a necessary concession for the maintenance of patriarchal order.

Considering the position of women in the Sixties is essential to understanding the dynamics of the “experimental” novelists both as a group and within their contemporary society. Compare how Alan Burns’ flâneur –esque wandering impacts upon his found material collages like *Babel* and the fact Eva Figes was limited to working in “short periods. Sometimes not more than an hour a day... when the children go to school” (*The Imagination on Trial*, 39). This comparison may allow us to position her dense, intricate internal-monologue prose within a relevant social context of increasing single-parenthood. More palpable, however, are the routine examples of how little Sixties “progressive” attitudes really impacted women’s lives. Brooke-Rose’s mother, on hearing her daughter was offered a lectureship at a Paris university, responded by telling her “not to go. Why? Because if you get a job he [her husband] won’t support you... If I had listened to her at every stage I would never have done anything” (*Remake*, 29). Equally condemning is Rayner Heppenstall’s description of a party at which “a small black man spent the evening pawing one of the women after another”, one of whom was Eva Figes, to which the only comment made was that “his behaviour was ‘red-blooded’” (*The Master Eccentric*, 50). Heppenstall’s quiet disapproval at the situation (unhelpfully mingled with his racial prejudices) nevertheless fails to make an appearance a few days later when he finds out that “Eva is publishing a Women’s Lib. book, having been deserted by the father of her children” (68). The implication that it was Figes’ personal failure to maintain her marriage that led her to write *Patriarchal Attitudes*, rather than a society in which casual molestation is routine, perhaps indicates the limits of Sixties liberalism and its conception of gender politics.

Nigel Fountain, who traces the roots of feminist periodicals such as *Spare Rib* through the “underground” press of the Sixties and their problematic discourse of sexual liberation, writes that “Greer, together with Eva Figes whose *Patriarchal Attitudes* was also a key influence, remained resolutely detached from the upsurge” (107) when it came to grass-roots feminism in the early 1970s. This did not, however, prevent both of these

writers from engaging in a great amount of political journalism and essay-writing work and an increasing amount of public speaking – being involved as writers if not as political activists. The 1978 Virago edition of *Patriarchal Attitudes* features a glowing new introduction in which Figes describes the “massive postbag from all over the country [which] told me that thousands, perhaps millions of women had the same chip [on their shoulder]” (7) and how once “Women’s workshops sprang up all over the country; almost every college had its feminist group, and women’s associations of long standing and of all kinds suddenly joined in the growing chorus demanding women’s rights” (8) the sexually-orientated changes of the Sixties expanded such that by 1975 Labour passed the Sex Discrimination Act making it illegal to discriminate on grounds of gender. Whereas the Sixties recognised “women’s changing role” (as it was often phrased), it is only when faced with the wave of feminist activism in the Seventies that the law officially recognised the distinctness and essential inferiority of this “role” to be a problem deeply rooted in a discriminatory society. When looking at the “experimental” novel’s ideological content then, and its essentially ambiguous response to contemporary social conditions, it must be remembered that the great unspoken frustrations given voice by feminism did not at that time even have the language by which to express ideas. In a society where the word “sexism” is still an obscure neologism, bringing gender politics to life through fiction was one of the few ways to successfully communicate discontent.

1.2.8: Anthony Burgess: a Case Study in Influence

To draw to a close this section on how the social conditions of the Sixties shaped the experience of “experimental” novelists as people, it is worthwhile to consider the networks of influence by which “experimental” techniques operated in the manner Bray, Gibbons and McHale describe: as vanguards leading forward the novel as a form. Throughout this study there will be numerous examples given of writers influenced by and in turn influencing Sixties “experimental” writing. These include those like Zulfikar Ghose and Maureen Duffy who were close to the writers being studied, counter-cultural figures like Jeff Nuttall and Alexander Trocchi, previous generations of “experimenters” like Rayner Heppenstall, those who, like Brigid Brophy and Tom Phillips, made unique singular contributions (*In Transit* and *A Humument* respectively), the international influences from the *nouveau romanciers* to the Beats, and those writers who innovated in the novel form whilst maintaining mainstream popularity such as John Fowles and D.M. Thomas. As was discussed above, and as studies like Francis Booth’s demonstrate, to approach the Sixties “experimental” novel from an aesthetic perspective is to encounter a huge amount of material with very little internal consistency. By approaching certain writers who share a certain outlook in relation to the period the project not only becomes manageable, but the patterns recognised can then be made visible within other writers’ trajectories.

One such writer whose path regularly crosses those of the writers in this study, who championed their writing and shared a commitment to the development of the novel form, and who himself – in novels like *M/F* and *Napoleon Symphony* – attempted his own form of “experiment”, was Anthony Burgess. Included in Giles Gordon’s *Beyond the Words* anthology, Burgess is the only writer also included in Karl Miller’s 1968 *Writing in England Today*, against which Gordon’s project was set. It was against his own ability to write “experimentally” and reach a large audience that Burgess viewed the rest of the

“best-sellers deliberately manqué” (“Foreword”, 19) within the collection; suggesting that, for all his greater sales, they represented greater authenticity. “I greatly admired the books of B.S. Johnson and Ann Quin,” he writes, “not only for their willingness to try new things but also for their firmly traditional virtues”; character, plot, mimesis, and realistic motivations. Burgess’ wider geographical and historical scope – he suggests England has “many reviewers but few critics” (19) – demonstrates a sympathy with the “experimental” writers’ view of the novel form as essentially a medium in need of progression which is being doomed to irrelevance through the conservative nature of the literary “Establishment”.

Burgess’ output during the Sixties is fairly traditional in form and content. Even the exceptional *A Clockwork Orange* (1961) was conceived primarily as science-fiction which was at that time still considered separate to the “literary” novel. His real exploration of “experimental” forms occurs around the end of the “Long Sixties”. The linguistically adventurous *M/F* (1971) represents “an attempt to make a comic structuralist novel, in which the real hero... is Claude Levi-Strauss” (telegram), and the epic-scale *Napoleon Symphony* (1974) is an attempt to write the story of Napoleon through the form of Beethoven’s *Eroica* symphony. Burgess was nevertheless keenly up-to-date in his journalistic and personal reading habits. A perceptive early review of Johnson’s (later disowned) *Travelling People* demands of writers “a greater and greater concern with technique” with which he credits Johnson, if only on the proviso that now that he “has a fine set of instruments: he must... set about making something with them” (*Yorkshire Post*, 4). Burgess’ 1967 book-length study of the contemporary novel, *The Novel Now*, conceived as a guide to literature students, demonstrates a wide knowledge of what is occurring both across continents and within Britain itself – far more than Miller’s collection does, for instance. The breadth of Burgess’ range perhaps being most clearly demonstrated by an article on “flower language” which appeared in the sixth issue of “underground” magazine *Oz* and which presents a linguistic analysis of its burgeoning hippy readership’s speech patterns. An eccentric yet highly accomplished figure of working class origins himself, it is writers like Burgess who provide the exception to the rule concerning the literary Establishment; positive reviews of “experimental” works being mostly limited to such originals.

In Burgess’ personal life he appears far closer to Christine Brooke-Rose than the others. She appears a number of times in his biography *You’ve Had Your Time*, in which he describes her as having “beaten the *nouveau romanciers* at their own game” (261). His familiarity with her work was such that, having a dog which could apparently understand the word “out”, even “when it was merely spelt”, and responded with “hysterical ecstasy” (18), he resorted to using her name instead on account of her 1964 novel which took the word for its title. Whether the dog learned to associate the words “Christine Brooke-Rose” with walkies is left unreported. B.S. Johnson, alongside whom Burgess appears in 1971’s *Penguin Modern Stories 7*, presented more of a challenge to the author; “I don’t want to talk to Bryan about the novel,” he reputedly once said “he has views about it” (*The Imagination on Trial*, 93). Nevertheless, a manuscript copy of Johnson’s novel *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry* appears in the International Anthony Burgess Foundation archive, suggesting that Burgess had intimate access to the work prior to its publication (the main character had yet to be changed from “Xtie” to “Christie”, for

example). According to Eva Figes, it was also only on Burgess' say-so that her first novel *Equinox* was published by Faber and Faber (*The Imagination on Trial*, 34). Based upon just these impressions one can begin to have a sense of how Burgess and acclaimed authors like him could make a dramatic impact in furthering commercially unappealing "experimental" writing in the climate of a profit-driven publishing industry. Just as the "Establishment" exists largely as a functional term – a means of generalising which will inevitably breed numerous exceptions – the barrier between "mainstream" and "experimental" is also breached by authors such as Burgess. There remains however, even within Burgess' own writing on the subject, a sense in which these writers were particularly special, particularly innovative, and particularly "experimental".

1.3: The Death of Keynesianism

1.3.1: Keynesianism versus Neoliberalism

In drawing together a brief survey of how British post-war economic conditions framed the "experimental" novel as a recognisable mode, a number of issues have been raised which would lend such works a distinctness from other, comparable texts. Some of these issues are contemporary; comparisons with the *nouveau romanciers* must account for the differences between a book-buying French public and a book-borrowing British public raised by Birch, for example. One key issue on which historical conditions present an opportunity for differentiation, however, is how these writers fit the concept of "postmodernism" conceived as a late-twentieth century mode of being and presentation. Literary tropes of the kind identified by Patricia Waugh, Linda Hutcheon and Brian McHale are certainly visible in many of these texts, although the kinds of readings which subsequently emerge concerning metanarratives, history and irony seem at times almost antithetical to the "progressive" project on which these writers embarked. The reason for this, I argue, can be seen more readily when considering the social theorists of "postmodernity" such as David Harvey and Fredric Jameson. The subtitle of Jameson's own study, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, highlights the kind of socioeconomic context that Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* unpacks in regard to urban geography; that the "postmodern" appears, like the majority of studies that use the term, around the 1980s and 1990s. Where the Sixties represented the triumph of the Welfare State, "managed economy", and Keynesianism, these decades represent the high water-mark of deregulation, free markets and Neoliberalism. The free-floating market deregulation of neoliberalism is often considered a major influence on the ideological outlook of postmodernism and it is this aspect which distinguishes it from the progressive, forward-looking, Space Aged "experimental" writers.

Comparing the "postmodern" and the "experimental" is not simply an exercise in transhistorical categorisation, however, but importantly sets the limits to the "long Sixties" as the *annus horribilis* of 1973. The post-war economy, driven by an urgent need to rebuild infrastructure and a heightened class-consciousness placing the Labour Party into

power, turned to the economic policies of Keynes for an answer. His belief that “the outstanding faults of the economic society in which we live are its failure to provide for full employment and its arbitrary and inequitable distribution of wealth and incomes” (Keynes, 233), provided motivation for the Welfare State which, in turn, was validated by increasing economic prosperity. In 1973, however, the British economy was struck by both a burst property price bubble (Fig. 12 (301) (Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 146)) and the international Oil Crisis (Fig. 13, 301). The market crash would cast a long shadow over the subsequent Seventies and “since Keynes was... accredited with the theoretical rationale for the managed economy... it was natural that he should be blamed when it all appeared to go wrong in the 1970s” (Middleton, 23). In place of Keynes, economists increasingly turned to theorists such as Friedman and Hayek – later to become known as the architects of neoliberalism – who preached “strong individual private property rights, the rule of law, and the institutions of freely functioning markets and free trade” which, formulated as the highest moral as well as economic good, demanded of “the state [that it] use its monopoly of the means of violence to preserve these freedoms at all costs” (Harvey, *A Brief...*, 64). Following the “economic miracle” forced upon Chile by Pinochet’s 1974 coup and subsequent dictatorship – in which a neoliberal dismantling of the state created large profits for global capital – the Thatcher and Reagan governments would help to accelerate neoliberalism’s rise to global hegemony. 1973 marks the point at which politicians and economists began turning away from praising a “managed” economy in favour of the “freedom of the markets”.

Although it would take the depression-laden, politically tumultuous decade of the Seventies to fully bring neoliberalism into prominence, the ideological commitment of theorists like Friedman and Hayek to libertarian values placed them in a certain uncomfortable alliance with a lot of the New Left thinking emerging in the Sixties. Theodore Roszak, for example, whose 1969 book *Making of a Counter-Culture* was the fullest academic attempt to grasp the new politics of the Sixties (albeit American-based), argued throughout for the end of a managed economy or, as he described it, the “technocracy”. “The prime strategy of the technocracy... is to level life down to a standard of so-called living that technical expertise can cope with – and then, on that false and exclusive basis, to claim an intimidating omnipotence over us by its monopoly of the experts” (12). In a similar fashion, although more aware of the subtleties involved in such an argument, Marcuse’s popular book *One-Dimensional Man* argued against the homogenisation of life under the post-war consensus. In Chapter 6 this recuperation of anti-Establishment feeling into neoliberalism (and the transition from a forward-looking “experimental” outlook into an ironic “postmodern” one) is further investigated in relation to Christine Brooke-Rose’s experiences of the ultimate New Left moment – Paris, May ’68. For the moment, however, it is important to remember that reading an unconscious proto-Thatcherism in those criticising the post-war consensus would be to project history backwards from the present, rather than to work from the context outwards and to impose “postmodern” values onto writers in the British Sixties is to fall foul of a similar conceit.

In fact, the arguments against “technocracy” and the homogeneity of a managed economy appear in many “anti-Establishment” writers in a similar fashion as they do with the “experimental” novelists. The kind of criticisms made by B.S. Johnson in *Albert Angelo*, for example, demand increased Welfare State spending; “if the government wanted better

education it could be provided for easy enough, so I must conclude, again, that they specifically want the majority of children to be only partially-educated” (176). In a similar fashion, Eva Figes’ proposals for an increase in women’s economic self-determination are – in the manner of many of her contemporary feminists – centred around state provision as well as legal measures. The conflicts between unions and government-supported industry which became ubiquitous during the Seventies were in such stark contrast to the situation of the Sixties that prominent New Left historian Ralph Miliband was confident in attacking unions for wanting “promising youngsters from the working classes to ‘rise to the top’” (289) and, in doing so, using their strength “to contain and discipline their members” (370) rather than supporting them as a class. Looking back on the cultural industries, Raymond Williams too describes how “that old friend the ‘mixed economy’” was most often used as “pressure to *reduce* the public sector” (“Culture and Technology”, 126). The democratic socialist post-war ideology which, as was earlier argued, frames the “experimental” as a term and is positioned as “anti-Establishment,” is in total opposition to neoliberal conceptions of “freedom” as “liberty”. Rather, “freedom” is provided through democratic state structures and the problems with these structures lie in the fact that they are not democratic enough. In order to understand what happens to writing at the end of the “long Sixties”, grasping 1973 and the “Death of Keynesianism” is essential.

1.3.2: The End of the Experiment

Remarking on the Conservative victory of 1970, Zulfikar Ghose wrote to B.S. Johnson, “What happened to the Labour Party? I notice that one of Heath’s first pronouncements was to start selling arms to South Africa again. The dark ages are approaching, mate” (22/6/70). This was not a singular opinion about the direction in which Britain was moving. As Francis Wheen describes the situation in his study of the Seventies, *Strange Days Indeed*, the widespread faith in technological progression was coming to be replaced by a “golden age of paranoia”. Right-wing commentators like Terry Goldsmith were predicting total social collapse, his 1971 book *Can Britain Survive?* predicting that “the social system most likely to emerge is best described as feudal. People will gather round whichever strong men can provide the basic necessities” (Wheen, 8). The National Theatre was by 1973 staging *The Party*, “a three-hour Trotskyist seminar, led by no less a figure than Lawrence Olivier” (49) and “the famous Marxist bookshop on the Charing Cross Road, Collett’s, could no longer accommodate all their publications [as] left-wing journals proliferated to such an extent [there were] more than a hundred and fifty on display” (50) at any one time. In Arthur Marwick’s study of *The Sixties*, he makes sure to state throughout that, in spite of aiming for a “classless”, “meritocratic” society, the post-war consensus remained strongly aware of social class. “Regularly throughout the sixties interviews and opinion polls showed that well over 90 per cent of the population recognised the existence of social classes” (278), whilst one “representative sample” broke these self-identified classes down into 69% working class, 29% middle class, 1% upper class, and 1% upper-middle class with a 1% “other” category. It can be seen that this lingering awareness of class in the face of an ideological desire to “progress” beyond it represents the battle-lines across which Seventies class struggles would divide.

The “experimental” novelists who already had committed political undertones to their works, to different extents, responded to such a climate in different ways. B.S. Johnson (whose

political radicalisation alongside Alan Burns is described in my paper “Cell of One” (2014)) would comment in an interview to Burns that “in England I don’t think books can change anything. Here if you want change you’ve got to throw bombs or work through parliament” (*The Imagination on Trial*, 88). His turn to political filmmaking in *March!* (1970), *Unfair!* (1970), and *What is the Right Thing and am I Doing It?* is accompanied by the politically volatile *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry* (1973) featuring a terrorist for a lead character. Eva Figes, whose 1973 essay “Accustomed as I am to Public Speaking” deals directly with writers’ political commitments, stated that “a writer... must have the same political commitment as any other citizen, ‘must’ because there is no room for sitters-on-the-fence. If you are not for you are against, and inaction and apathy become guilt by default”. As will be further described in chapter 3, it is during this period where Figes’ career as feminist essayist extends its scope to matters of the Welfare State, free speech and the role of humanism in life and government policy generally. The demand for a writer to hold political commitment in their approach to the novel form is never more outspoken than during the early 1970s, but it is also the point at which the sense of the novel form as an important political battlefield in itself starts to become unstuck. A review of Figes’ *B* (1972) sent to her in a letter by Johnson demonstrates how politics and the novel form were beginning to jar when described in the same register;

It becomes increasingly clear to many writers that the only honest thing for a novel to be about is writing a novel. The truly contemporary novelist’s dialogue is not now with God, or a hypothetical reader, or even with himself: but with his material, life itself, or those aspects in which he or she is particularly interested. Readers might do well to give this basic honesty a chance, for Eva Figes’ new novel *B* is still highly readable: no one need imagine that it is in any way difficult.

The postmodern trope of the novel about novels, the text about texts, is praised as the “truly contemporary” way of engaging with the form, yet – against postmodern distance – this is depicted as the more authentic way of reaching “life itself” in a mimetic fashion. But the demand that readers engage with “this basic honesty” and the promise that it is “still highly readable” betrays a sense of over-compensation; a feeling that the “experimental” novel as a means of revolutionising the novel for an age of mass communication may have been asking too much of a conservative reading public after all. The dichotomy between the populist and the avant garde novel, argued against so often and so convincingly in the Sixties, appears to re-emerge with a new urgency at the moment of crisis.

It is in the exhaustion that occurs after the failure of the “experimental” novelists to pull down the monolithic Nineteenth Century Novel when familiar “postmodern” attitudes become their most visible. Whereas the “Space Age” may have promised an exciting, living “scientific revolution”, the disillusion brought by its limited results frames itself with palpable irony; as Brook-Rose wrote in retrospect in 1981’s *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, “That this century is undergoing a reality crisis has become a banality, easily and pragmatically shrugged off. Perhaps it is in fact undergoing a crisis of the imagination; a fatigue, a decadence” (3). Figes’ essays of the time demonstrate a similar attitude. One, “The New Humanism”, clearly intended for the *New Humanist* magazine to which she often contributed, describes how

I grew up during a period which now looks, with hindsight, mighty like the tail-end of the Industrial Miracle. It was like a star which flares up to burn with dazzling brightness just

before the moment of collapse and death. And I suppose extreme youth lent a certain enchantment to the view...

The essay then goes on to get lost in a form of aggressive irony that, without any sense in which direction it is aimed, lends the entire piece an unexplained bitterness. The earlier unpublished piece "Prosaic" (1970) provides some indication of its direction, beginning with the line, "We have outgrown ourselves. Sit, bored and alienated, watching astronauts float about in black space on television". What had previously been marvels of science, technology and progress become ironic symbols of commercialised, purposeless first world ennui. It could be that, in the face of daily news about suffering and conflict, the cause of the New Novel appeared somewhat ephemeral. It could also be simply that, once the novelty wore off, the "experimental" writers were left with little financial reward for a decade's work and, faced by plummeting living standards, were beginning to reassess their position.

As Maureen Duffy described the situation to Melanie Seddon, "in the seventies there was an economic crisis and publishers told those of us who were writing novels (as they often do) that the novel was dead and we should write non-fiction". Economic imperatives can be seen throughout the surviving "experimental" writers' career trajectories from 1973 onwards. Alan Burns and Christine Brooke-Rose both took up lecturing positions; Burns' *The Angry Brigade* (1973), his most "realist" work after a string of increasingly "cut-up" pieces would be his last published novel until 1981's *The Day Daddy Died*, whilst Brooke-Rose's 1975 *Thru*, compiled during the early 1970s, is in many ways a parody of literary "experiment" and marked the end of her novel writing career until 1984's *Amalgamemnon*. Eva Figs, although continuing to publish novels, was increasingly concerned with journalism and non-fiction writing which, it can be seen, changed the content of her novel writing away from "experimental" concerns. 1973 marks the end of Ann Quin and B.S. Johnson's careers as it was the year of their suicides, in August and November respectively. The unpublished works that they left behind, Quin's *The Unmapped Country* set in a mental asylum and Johnson's *See the Old Lady Decently* about his mother, both centre upon fixations they had held throughout their writing careers and lives in general. Considering these writers as a group, as is the concern of this study, also allows us to consider the cumulative effect that the end of "experimental" novel writing would have created. Whereas much of the longevity, vitality and relative success of the group was attained through the mutual benefits of promoting a shared cause, the fewer writers there are still engaging with such a cause, the less easy it is to continue both morally and economically. As the "long Sixties" marked an end of a whole series of cultural and economic developments, the British "experimental" novel would also change considerably as the Seventies moved on into the "postmodern" era and newer conceptions of the novel and its function came to the fore.

1.3.3: The "Experimental" and the "Postmodern"

When cultural theorists engage with the notion of "Postmodernity" as the dominant mode of being during the late twentieth century – what David Harvey labels "neoliberal" and Jameson "late capitalist" – the "postmodern" is taken as that which culturally reflects this way of being in a succinct fashion. For Linda Hutcheon the preference of surfaces over deep narratives of history is typified in the popularity of "historiographic metafiction" and for Brian McHale a lack of faith in representation moves literature away from the problems of epistemology and towards a project of disrupting ontology. The common

tropes of irony, playfulness and iconoclasm are symptoms of an advanced society which no longer holds faith in Grand Narratives and whether one celebrates or criticises this lies at the heart of any discussion on the subject of the “postmodern”. What marks out many critical responses to the “postmodern”, however, is not necessarily their wholehearted rejection of what the concept represents but the moments of break and rupture in the process of its formation which mark other possibilities and potential trends that may have emerged in its place.

Raymond Williams, in a lecture posthumously published entitled “The Politics of the Avant Garde”, focuses more on the Thirties than the Sixties, but nevertheless makes very similar comments to those writing about “postmodernism”,

The rhetoric may still be of endless innovation. But instead of revolt there is the planned trading of spectacle, itself significantly mobile and, at least on the surface, deliberately disorienting. We then have to recall that the politics of the avant garde, from the beginning, could go either way. (62)

In this comment, as well as the rest of the essay, Williams posits a level of complicity in the functioning of the cultural marketplace which, for him, represents a conservative cynicism divorced from the transformative desires which lie behind radical aesthetics. What the “experimental” writers demonstrate, however, is how a shared vision of radical purpose in reshaping the novel form could in fact work in harmony with material interests; pressuring the Arts Council and the BBC, amongst other institutions, to act in the interests of “anti-Establishment” avant garde writers. It is not the presence of material commercial interests that renders an avant garde reactionary but the lack of a political will to commandeer and reorientate those structures. It is the perceived apolitical, complacent nature of “postmodernism” that Eagleton targets in his polemic *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, laying the blame upon

post-structuralism, which emerged in oblique ways from the political ferment of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and which like some repentant militant became gradually depoliticised after being deported abroad... [It] succeeded in hijacking much of that political energy, sublimating it into the signifier in an era when precious little subversion of any other sort seemed easily available. (25)

It is in this mode that Marxist critics especially have approached “postmodernism”. Jameson’s view of a 1960s “truly revolutionary collective experience... systematically effaced by the return of desperate individualisms” (*Brecht and Method*, 10) does similar work in placing a distinction between the world of possible utopias before May ’68 and the world after its “failure”. It is an argument that is in many ways very convincing and accurately describes the sorts of transformations going on within academia and the wider literary and cultural industries in general. These transformations too were only made in response to and within the context of a changing economy. As work like Jodi Dean’s demonstrates, the suitability of a “postmodern” vision of the world as just another text and the mass communication-enabled increasing casualization and deregulation within the global economy (a “communicative capitalism”) makes thinking beyond the boundaries of the postmodern surface difficult.

What the “experimental” novelists represent, however, and what their particular perspective on the Sixties allows us in turn to see, is – as Eva Figes writes in *Tragedy and*

Social Evolution – “individual genius is not necessarily enough, and it is important to be born at the right time... a tree, however healthy, will not bear fruit unless the soil and weather are right” (7). The progressive “anti-Establishment” ideology of the Sixties grew, as has been shown, out of a society-wide investment in creating prosperity for all following the Second World War. Considering one of the hallmarks of neoliberal economics has been the growth of immense wealth disparities in the midst of seemingly wealthy nations, one cannot help but place the self-reflexive reveries of postmodernism within a similar context; the Establishment revelling in the old, cynical about the new, set against anything but superficial change and, when pushed, denying that change is even possible. Class mobility and educational access have never been meaningfully distinguishable from the macroeconomies of which they are factors. If “postmodernism” is marked by the apolitical and culturally self-regarding, is this not as much a comment on who constructs the culture as the content of the culture itself? By looking at these British “experimental” writers in the context of the Sixties we are indeed looking at one of the “possible” avant garde philosophies which never “came to be” in a hegemonic sense, but we are also looking at the Sixties through the writing of a group it managed to just about sustain; at the periphery and the forefront at the same moment.

Chapter 2: “Ground Down, and Other Clichés”: Class, Crisis and Consciousness in B.S. Johnson

In addressing the British “experimental” novel of the Sixties, it is fitting that the first writer studied in depth should be B.S. Johnson. A tireless innovator in terms of the physical form of the book, Johnson was widely known as the creator of such works as the “book in

a box” *The Unfortunates*. Perhaps as a result of this, Johnson was often dismissed as a writer who used “gimmicks”; superficial tricks which, condemnably, had “already been done” (Gasiorek) by the likes of Laurence Sterne. However, it is his will to generate a new form for the novel – innovating not only physically but in terms of style and content as well – which makes him a central figure in the Sixties “experimental” literary scene. Often bullish in his championing of the cause of “writing as though it mattered”, B.S. Johnson could be seen as a kind of figurehead for underappreciated writers of the time. As will be seen, Johnson’s work is currently returning to scholars’ attention as writing worthy of merit. The aspect of Johnson’s work that has yet to be fully unpacked and which is of central concern to the interests of this study is how Johnson’s relationship with the British class system are thoroughly imbued in his writing. By addressing the aspects of class in Johnson’s work the actuality of Sixties changing attitudes can be placed under the spotlight and the radical political aspect of the search for new novel forms uncovered.

2.1: Critical Understanding of B.S. Johnson

Early academic reception of Johnson focused primarily upon his work as a formal innovator; albeit with the name-checking of his inspirations, Joyce and Beckett (along with the aforementioned, Sterne) as a subtle caveat as to his comparatively inferior status. His place in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, written by Morton P. Levitt, is centred on how, “for an English writer, Johnson is remarkably conscious and theoretical in his ideas about what he wants to do” (439). A similar essay by Robert S. Ryf appearing in *Critique* in 1977 identifies Johnson with the idea that “experimentation was not something to be simply gotten out of one’s system so that one could get back to the mainstream but was, indeed, the mainstream” (73). The place of Johnson is defined alongside “experimentation” and the “theoretical” approaches that enter into his writing, with the implication that in order to read Johnson’s work one must similarly be immersed within such “conscious” approaches. In an extreme yet illuminating example, Valerie Butler describes one of Johnson’s BBC interview appearances in which his arguments were edited out of the final show and “the platform on which he had hoped to counter some of the negative press his novels received in review simply presented listeners with the BBC’s view of literary experiment” (122) which, as can be imagined from the description of BBC policy presented in the first chapter, were as negative one might expect. Sympathetic or outwardly hostile, B.S. Johnson’s name was nevertheless understood on similar reductive terms as a modern novelist taking things “too far”.

As Glyn White suggests in *Reading the Graphic Surface*, however, “the extent of Johnson’s experimentation becomes problematic for his legacy only when surveys of his work are forced to confront the lack of formal homogeneity between the novels” (85). Without a consistent line of argument obviously connecting the works of the Johnson oeuvre, academic reviewers were left only with an abstract appreciation of his commitment to experimenting. Under such conditions the study of Johnson soon dried up in Britain, leaving only a “fragmentary, cult appreciation” of his work in America “with Johnson somewhat awkwardly becoming a postmodernist or, at least, a harbinger of postmodernity” (Tew and White, 6). Outside of Philip Tew’s monograph *B.S. Johnson: A Critical Reading* in 2001 and a handful of journal articles, interest in B.S. Johnson would

not properly return to the British academy until Jonathan Coe's 2004 biography, *Like a Fiery Elephant*; the resulting interest inspired by which can be seen in the essays collected in Tew and White's *Re-Reading B.S. Johnson* (2007), amongst other publications. Unlike his key influences of Joyce and Beckett, Johnson's collected work lacks a coherent internal logic of progression – limiting its initial academic appeal – yet once theories inspired by postmodern readings are available alongside a sudden new wealth of biographical insight, a new set of multifaceted approaches is now appearing in places such as *BSJ: The B.S. Johnson Journal*, the first dedicated Johnson studies periodical. As of the end of 2013, the British Library will also have catalogued their archive holdings, making direct access to Johnson's personal papers possible as never before.

In terms of taking B.S. Johnson's life as a direct influence upon his writing, there are a number of clear correlations that have long been established: the most obvious two being *Trawl* and *See the Old Lady Decently* that comment upon their own autobiographical inspiration as part of the narrative of the text. Similarly, however, Nicolas Tredell has drawn out in his work *Fighting Fictions* how Johnson's position as "accounts clerk" at a number of businesses during the early 1950s "bore fictional fruit in *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*" (8), and Jonathan Coe has identified the part-time teaching position Johnson took in the early 1960s, "typical of the hand-to-mouth existence he had to cope with for the next three years or so", as directly entering in to *Albert Angelo*. In my own work I have also drawn out influences upon these texts from Johnson's pro-Trade Union activism in regards to *Christie Malry...* (2014) as well as his own comprehensive school experiences that shaped *Albert Angelo* (2011). In spite of these and other attempts to draw from Johnson's life as a means of gaining insight into his texts, there has yet to be a protracted reading of how Johnson's experience as a working class author impacts upon his overall approach. Perhaps by readdressing tropes emergent within theoretical and textual readings of Johnson's work a fuller synthesis of the "experimental" Johnson and the biographical Johnson can be negotiated.

Concerning the "experimental" Johnson, the most commonly returned to characteristic of his novels is their use of metafictional techniques. The interpretations of his use of an intrusive and omnipotent author-figure are as numerous as his own usage of the device. An example from the end of *House Mother Normal*, where the House Mother uses her extra page "outside the... framework of twenty-one pages per" character to describe the novel as "a diagram of certain aspects of the inside of [the writer's] skull! What a laugh!" (22) may be read in a McHalean manner as simply an ontological scandal illuminating fiction's inherent artifice. However, when considered next to authorial intervention of *See the Old Lady Decently*, a novel in which "Johnson insisted at an early stage that the writing of the novel must itself be one element of the novel" (Ryf, 68), the same framework of interpretation begins to falter. Indeed, an interjection in which "I have just broken off to pacify my daughter" (27) that leads to a story in which he is the parent – an inversion of the motherhood theme of the novel – can be seen to anchor the novel more firmly in reality, in the present of its writing; the opposite of the earlier distancing technique.

A similar set of opposing readings can be drawn from the overall effect on the novels of Johnson's techniques of physical manipulation of text, graphic surface, and (in the case of *The*

Unfortunates) bookbinding. Again, the readings seem to be determined by pre-existing preferences for “traditional” aspects such as narrative or “experimental” interest in technical innovation. Ryf, in his 1977 article, almost sidesteps *The Unfortunates*’ unorthodox structuring (each chapter presented individually bound, loose within a box to be read in any order by the reader) in favour of “what comes through most forcefully,” which is “not the question of order but of grief” (64). The implication is almost that the novel would have been better without the “question of order” being raised at all, the better to emphasise the “grief”.^[12] On the other hand, readings such as Alan Kirby’s in *Digimodernism* concentrate entirely upon the technique used; in this case, as a precursor to contemporary digital texts. “The sequencing of the novel” is placed foremost in the reading; where it was once “traditionally the author’s sole responsibility” it is now “carried out by the ‘reader’” (92). For Kirby, this means that *The Unfortunates* has 1.551121 times 10 to the power of 25 “possible orders”, in the manner of a variable computer programme. As with the meaning of the author-figure, there are here two directly contrasting takes on Johnson’s innovations; either they get in the way of the writing or they are the primary function of the text.

Studies such as Glyn White’s *Reading the Graphic Surface* and Philip Tew’s *B.S. Johnson: A Critical Reading* have made convincing arguments against the kind of approaches that would identify a contradiction between unorthodox typography and the mimetic function of Johnson’s fiction. White’s thesis is that “disruptions and difficulties at the level of graphic surface which require special negotiation are part of the process of reading the text in which they appear and... cannot be abstracted from it” (21), as a result “the reader responds to [them as they would] to difficulties in the purely semantic message, by taking context and metatext into account” (22). This can perhaps best be witnessed in the Johnson canon in the case of the section beginning “Julie rang on the Saturday...” that conveys a sense of the frailty concomitant with grief both in a single paragraph describing the news of Tony’s death and in the physical act of the reader holding a lone piece of paper (White, 116). It does, however, also help to demonstrate many of the moments of existential crisis such as the “Fuck all this lying!” (167) of *Albert Angelo* and the “But why? All is chaos and / unexplainable” (82) of *Christie Malry...* that Tew ties in to his description of the Johnsonian aesthetic;

The form and the content through various modes of irresolution exemplify the problematic at the core of Johnson’s aesthetic drive, the admission of, if undialecticised, otherwise oppositional elements of life and language that would remain divided as forms of impossibility or irresolution. (“(Re)-Acknowledging B.S. Johnson’s Radical Realism, or Re-Publishing *The Unfortunates*”)

It can be seen that the initial readings that locate a contradiction within Johnson’s works – positioning them as oxymoronic realist-metafictions – can be incorporated within more nuanced readings that demonstrate the compatibility and interrelation of elements. It is this particular “undialecticised” core of Johnson’s writing in which its aesthetic unity and narrative strength lies.

The “undialecticised” core of Johnson’s writing is engaged with at essay-length by Carol Watts in “‘The Mind has Fuses’: Detonating B.S. Johnson” through the central metaphor taken from *The Unfortunates* quoted in her title. She describes it as the critical point the “irascible sense of impasse” that marks Johnson’s writing when “the discovery of sometimes incontrovertible limits...might make the lights go out altogether” due to

“affective overload” (80). It is an image that recurs both in Johnson’s published work, his letters and his notebooks: an overwhelming sense of the “chaos” of the universe that overcomes any attempt at meaningful encounters and narratives. This critical moment is read by a number of critics as a point of deepest existential crisis and modernist alienation. For Levitt it is connected to Johnson’s metafictionality: “an obvious heightening of the Romantic obsession with poetic creation but in a more human context” (440). Robert Bond similarly identifies a “vocationalism” – specifically in *Albert Angelo’s* use of architecture – that is “removed from any notion of collective or collaborative labour” and relates to an “ideology of inwardness and individuation” (44). The critical moment in which Johnson breaks from traditional description of a fictional world is presented as escape from the world, as either an elevation or a collapse, which represents a break from the material into the ideal. In a thematic sense, Johnson is following in the long tradition of bourgeois avant garde writing and experiencing a fragmentation of the personality, a descent into the realm of the soul.

The modernist Johnson can be seen to break free of history in both these ecstatic moments and equally through the abandoning of traditional, or Nineteenth Century Novel, form. For Johnson, “the traditional novel...must be avoided because it legitimises *acceptance* of the past” (39), to use Bond’s wording. In an interview with Alan Burns, Johnson himself described the “exorcism” that he experienced by writing himself out of the past – specifically his own past – and now “if I want to recall how I felt at the time I wrote *Trawl* I can read *Trawl*, but I don’t have to carry it with me. I don’t want that stuff popping into my mind” (85). The experience that Johnson conveys is one of an individuation not only distinct from what might loosely be termed the objective conditions of history, but from a personal sense of subjectively experienced history. Identity is rendered sovereign over both time and space. To return to reading Johnson from his influences, his style here is redolent of Beckett’s breathless solipsistic monologues in *Malone Dies* or *The Unnameable*. Unlike Beckett, however, Johnson’s collapse of being is driven home through its narrative counterpoint with the in depth “realist” descriptions of real life events documented elsewhere in the same novel. To read the texts alone it would thus be fitting to consider Johnson a “working class modernist”. The negotiation between social documentation and the individual mind within his novels always inevitably favours the latter.

2.2: Working Classness and Labour Value

As a means of addressing this quality of Johnson’s writing in regards to his class background without staging a re-enactment of the Brecht/Lukács debate, it will help if we introduce some of Johnson’s own ideas concerning the role of politics in literature. Collected in *The Imagination on Trial*, Johnson’s interview with Burns sees him defending the fact that “outside writing I’m a very political animal. My novels have generally been written from a political stance but the politics have been very much in the background” (88). For Johnson his contemporary British readers “don’t regard books as a way of changing the world” (89); at least not in the way that “the generation of... Welsh miners who educated themselves in libraries [or] the Left Book Club in the thirties” (89) did. The novel is simply an expression of experience, not a means to communicate political points – especially now that cinema and television were playing such a dominant role in the national culture. His own political aspirations he channelled in to films such as

March! and *Unfair!* made with Alan Burns that “helped a bit in mobilising the trade union movement” (89). For B.S. Johnson, audiences needed addressing directly should a political point need to be made – the notion that subject matter not directly political may have a politics of its own does not seem a conscious concern.

When we look to B.S. Johnson as a working class writer we are therefore not looking to him as a writer *for* the working class as an audience. Neither are we looking to him as a writer *of* the working class who would seek to translate his experience into the bourgeois novel form. Rather, we are simply looking to him as a writer that *is* working class. Although in the post-Blairite era of “identity politics” such an approach may appear reductive, from a historical perspective it locates B.S. Johnson at a critical moment in the expansion of the post-war welfare state. As a member of the working class Johnson nevertheless received a state funded university education leaving him in a position shared by many of his generation that now considered themselves “between classes”. The removal of traditional barriers to cultural institutions does not remove class distinctions, however, rather it indicates that class is not a static notion but a historically shifting negotiation of economic contradictions. Similarly, to seek a static definition of the “working classness” of Johnson’s novels is to miss their vitality as historical-cultural documents; narratological attempts at the unification of personal contradictions. The “blown fuse” of the Johnsonian mind, its chaos and confusion, is a violent collision between proletarian experience and the literary ideology of the bourgeoisie.

Johnson’s presentation of class-consciousness does not occur on an abstract level so much as physically, as part of the symbols documented during everyday life. *Trawl* presents the genesis of this class consciousness as part of the young Johnson’s wartime evacuee experience wherein the “dislike of us, the bare toleration of us” (51) by their *Daily Telegraph* reading hosts is initially considered to be the sneer of the boss to the worker; “my mother was in fact or virtually a servant”. Taking a moment to remember, however, Johnson then clarifies that she was “not a servant paid by him, not a servant to him unpaid, but just of the servant class, to him” (51). When Nicos Poulantzas writes about class-consciousness he describes the “autonomous discourse” of the working class “which Lenin called ‘class instinct’, which bursts through the envelope that is the domination of bourgeois ideology” (122). Cornelius Castoriadis locates this instinct in the fact that “everything that is presented to us in the social-historical world is inextricably tied to the symbolic” (117) and, as such, creates a “social imaginary” of shared class perspective. In each of Johnson’s encounters with class-consciousness we find elements of this cultural framework being brought in as signifiers but, more importantly, we also find class conflict, prejudices, and the concomitant feelings of shame and resentment “all too aware now of the worst of the human situation” (*Trawl*, 54). These realisations are presented in an almost opposing manner to the “blown fuse” epiphanies; the sites of Johnson’s resentful experiences reconstructed in documentary terms. There is a compact with the reader which assumes awareness of social signifiers such as *The Daily Telegraph* and a willingness to allow the situation presented to convey the message. The opposition between Johnson’s modernist, epiphanic style and the novels’ moments of social realism create a certain narrative tension which pulls between class poles.

In terms of the Marxist calibration of class-consciousness as a means of taking a

“class in itself” and organising it into a “class for itself” there remains very little in Johnson’s works; even if we do consider him in the light of his later Trade Union activist interests. In terms of class in relation to the mode of production, E.P. Thompson gives perhaps its most practical explanation in the introduction to *The Making of the English Working Class* (here abridged as “The Making of Class” in Joyce’s anthology);

Class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born – or enter involuntarily. (131)

From this perspective, the professional writer can never be considered as a member of a particular class at its “purest” consciousness in conflict with another class; the act of voluntary, self-expressive labour isn’t really alienated, even if it is exploited. The result is the kind of irony by which Johnson positions Christie Malry in his job as a bank employee – “he had not been born into money...he would therefore have to acquire it as best he could... The course most likely to benefit him would be to place himself next to the money... Christie was a simple person” (11). The individual that has identified their pre-determined class within capitalist society yet has not located their own place within it ends up replicating the superficial trappings of the ruling bourgeoisie – being near money – without receiving access to the economic position that would justify that ideology. From the perspective of labour relations the professional writer struggles to be identifiable as “working class” at all.

What Johnson does present us with, however, is an organic replication of this “class instinct” in the way in which he engaged with fellow writers. Famously championing his contemporaries “who are writing as though it mattered” (*Aren’t You Rather...*, 29), Johnson often positioned himself as a leader in the struggle for better literature. Active in the Arts Council, Society of Authors and – briefly – the campaign for Public Lending Right (as described in the first chapter), Alan Burns explained this militancy to Jonathan Coe in terms of how Johnson “didn’t fight for the writing of people he knew because they were his friends, but maybe they were his friends because he loved the work... partly it was generalship; you see, this was part of his campaign for the good stuff and we were his allies” (398/399). In terms of solidarity, Johnson finds his comradeship in fellow experimental writers who are both equally passionate about their work and equally poorly paid for it. His championing of fellow writers certainly didn’t extend to those he saw as the “Establishment”, as Ghose describes in his short piece “Bryan”, Johnson would often verbally abuse writers he considered to

belong to a particular class, socially much higher than [his own]; they are of that group of gifted or fortunate people whose class, together with an Oxbridge education, assures them a privileged position in London’s literary power struggle. Bryan despised them. (26)

Reading through Johnson’s letters and notebooks, the particular class dynamics by which this “campaign” can be seen as framed are notably similar to the formation of class-consciousness that is described in his novels; a pattern of rejection with an occasional success that is formulated as a victory. In a letter from Zulfikar Ghose as early as 1954, it is clear that Johnson is intimidated by the elite magazine *The Listener*, leading Ghose to suggest that “editors are

reasonably favourable to good small poems by unknown poets like us” and long poems are rejected “more because they are long”. The influence of Ghose early in Johnson’s career as a fellow self-mythologiser also plays into this sense of an embattled group of writers against the Establishment (in a letter marked 9th April 1959, Ghose literally states that he wants to “discuss an idea... for starting a new movement in poetry”). Ghose, amongst others who formed around Johnson’s *Universities Poetry* circle during his undergraduate years, validated Johnson’s writing and located it within their particular “movement”; one at variance with the “horrid bores of the Movement then in vogue” (“Bryan”, 23). That this conception of poetry draws upon the high modernist manifestos of such avant garde groupings as the futurists and the imagists is demonstrative in terms of its ability to be at once rooted in privileged positions and make claims to be anti-bourgeois as a “higher” culture. That, by 1960, Johnson is writing in his fifth notebook the rather peevish note, “Zulfikar Ghose, O.M. – in 30 years’ time a smiling, bald member of the establishment” (73), perhaps demonstrates how his particular conception of a “movement” develops a more fully oppositional class dynamic. Taking the language of group-formation from modernist elites, Johnson goes on to apply it in a manner more befitting one with opposing class interests. Johnson’s hardening of insurrectionary attitudes in his relationship with the “Establishment” can be seen developing right through his attack on the Society of Authors, into his sputtering attacks during the Public Lending Right campaign, and eventually, albeit in a humorous manner, in his novel *Christie Malry’s Own Double-Entry*.

The inversion of a model of personal interest to serve the shared interests of a class does not only occur in Johnson’s appropriation of the “movement” model of intellectual favouritism, but also in his continued efforts towards receiving his pay in salary form, rather than per novel. In a practical sense wage pay would relieve the financial and emotional burdens that living between lump-sum paycheques creates. But, like all negotiations over pay, there exists the clash of interests over symbolic value also. Rod Mengham, discussing Johnson’s demands in relation to his sense of self, suggests that wages would “reflect as far as possible not the market value of the text, but the value of the writer’s artistic gifts, of his creative personality” (100). Mengham notes how Johnson frequently deals with his own identity through the metaphors of “debts, loans, mortgages, value” (100). When a wage is paid to the writer, Johnson’s novels are figuratively recognised as emanations of an individual and not simply as commodities. A similar formulation of feeling is noted in the modernist avant garde by Raymond Williams in *The Politics of Modernism*, which he sees as “distantly analogous to the working class development of collective bargaining... yet one of the central points of their complaint against this treatment of art was that creative arts was more than simple labour” (54). For Williams this implies an aristocratic approach to culture that seeks to remove it from the bourgeois world of trade, where for Mengham Johnson can be seen to internalise trade to the extent that he perceives himself as a commodity.

To get to the root of this seeming contradiction it is perhaps worthwhile to turn to Marx’s *Capital* wherein the very same contradiction is posited at the heart of capitalism itself. In Chapter 6, opening a discussion of wage labour, Marx describes how the proletarian “must constantly look upon his labour-power as his own property, his own commodity, and this he can only do by placing it at the disposal of the buyer temporarily, for a definite

period of time. By this means alone can he avoid renouncing his rights over it" (109). For a biographically-influenced writer such as Johnson "labour-power" is entirely enmeshed within the self and inseparable from it. In asking for a wage, Johnson is then implying that the commodity of the manuscript is not what he is selling – he is only providing labour-power for the benefit of a publisher, who in turn claims surplus value in the sale of the commodity: the published novel. Johnson is asking for a formal recognition of his proletarian status in relation to the publisher-as-bourgeoisie. However, the market value of a novel is not dictated by the labour-power invested within it, nor is a writer beholden to the publisher for access to the means of production in creating the initial commodity form of the manuscript. Johnson's imaginative translation of traditional working class labour relations into the literary industry represents the "blown fuse" of clashing, oppositional ideologies in the field of economics. Johnson is thrown into a world of "chaos" not in an existential sense, but as an alienated worker within an individualistic free market.

From the perspective of the bourgeoisie, for whom individualism is a beneficial ideological model economically, Johnson's demand for payment in the form of wage labour can be taken simply as an upwardly mobile product of the meritocracy not yet acclimatised to their independent position. From a working class perspective, however, the wage system plays a pivotal cultural role (as indicated in the Marx quotation) in the separation of work and home life and, in a related manner, the upholding of self-respect. In his study of "aspects of working class life" *The Uses of Literacy*, Richard Hoggart describes the importance of a "sense of independence which arises from a respect for oneself [that] no one can physically take away"; something that relies upon "keeping the raft afloat" (79), the continuance of which is guaranteed in a consistent wage. What we are encountering in B.S. Johnson can therefore be considered a reaction against the destabilisation of working conditions he experienced in his transition to professional writer. The very form of Johnson's labour was considered suspect, unreliable, and he for practising it as a means of earning a living. This self-conscious tension is made visible in *The Unfortunates* as he describes his working conditions at his friend Tony's house,

Long afternoons there, where we would fall asleep, I would, anyway, feel guilty that we were not working as the world was working. June I remember saying something like that, finding it difficult to accept that Tony was working when lazing comfortably in an armchair reading a book. We were working really, it is difficult for others to understand. ("Then he was...", 2)

Without any noticeable difference between the activities of work and leisure the writer appears to lack meaningful employment altogether. For a writer like Johnson who is struggling to sustain himself financially anyway, the lack of a clear-cut and stable time and place of work strikes at the heart of his self-respect as a worker and provider. The demand for wage pay is not then a reflection of the actual working conditions of the writer, but an attempt to replicate the superficial conditions of working class existence as a salve for the ideological upset caused by the new insecurity. Wage labour is entirely to do with Johnson's sense of self, but not because he considered himself implicitly valuable. Rather, without the confidence imparted to the bourgeoisie through "cultural capital", a secure sense of self is entirely reliant upon the "debts, loans, mortgages" that Mengham identifies as metonymical within Johnson's discourse.

Johnson's particular notions of self-respect, stability and finance extend not only into his personal impression of himself but, perhaps inevitably, also into his attitudes to women. The commodification of sexual relationships exists not only on the most blatant level as humour – for example, the “small kindnesses from Joan” (47) priced at 0.28 in *Christie Malry...* - but also when Johnson attempts to withdraw from the bawdy into euphemism, such as the “usual desperate business” (85) of his father and mother's courtship in *See the Old Lady Decently*. For Bourdieu, the fact that Johnson deals in his sexual life in the same manner that he deals in his financial life is only to be expected as part of “an appetite for possession inseparable from permanent anxiety about property, especially about women” (330) is central to the mind-set of all “rising classes”. Indeed, for Bourdieu “a class is defined in an essential respect by the place and value it gives to the sexes” (102). There is, however, another important historical element to Johnson's attitudes which, although conforming to Bourdieu's analyses, does help to move our conception of Johnson's attitudes out of the area of ahistorical petit bourgeois misogyny and set them in a context; that being the sexual liberation movements of the 1960s and the women's liberation movements of the 1970s. Where the world of Hoggart's 1950s working class “still accepted marriage as normal and ‘right’, and that in their early twenties [for, among other reasons,] what a husband was earning at twenty-one he was likely to be earning at fifty-one” (58), the 1960s saw considerable changes in social conventions concerning marriage and the family. Framed by the widespread availability of the Pill in the early 1960s and liberalization of divorce laws in 1969 and 1973, the “permissive society” may have reshaped certain gender relations yet, as Anne Oakley argued in 1974 (*Housewife*), the impact of such changes is fairly limited beyond the middle classes. Alan Burns, describing his time as “a member, if not leader” of a group seeking to “abolish the family and all the stuff that goes with it” recounted to Jonathan Coe how Johnson would argue against this: “you can't oppose the family, it's all we've got” (405). Johnson's attitudes are not only token for a “rising” member of the working class, but they are also conservative in terms of contemporary mores within his social circle. On top of conflicted class anxieties about the stability of his labour position, Johnson is also in the uncomfortable position of appearing historically backward too. Stuck between a discredited tradition and a rootless future Johnson adopts possessiveness as a means to self-respect.

Johnson's desire to find security and stability in women is evidenced in his poetry where, as well as money-related metaphors, he also makes use of a range of imagery borrowed from heavy industry. Collected in *Penguin Modern Poets 25*, his works “Knowing” and “And Should She Die?” both invest in the love object the qualities of raw materials to be shaped and transformed through labour. “Knowing” describes how “knowledge of her was / earned like miner's pay” (138), functioning on one level as a kind of *entendre* for sexual activity in the form of mining but – more importantly, considering Johnson's own issues regarding pay – it also suggests an approach to relationships wherein commitment and struggle demand appropriate compensation. Similarly, “And Should She Die?” describes a woman as loved “as Brunel loved iron” (133), adding an intellectual element to the idea of mastering the natural and bending it to the will of the designer. The monetary language by which Johnson engages with women (here sexual, but elsewhere matriarchal too) is not commercial in the sense of acquiring women as objects but a more subtle rendering of emotions-as-investment. Such a conception of

relationships is fairly close to the dead metaphors of modern relationship counselling; “working” at “building” a relationship from “solid foundations”. The particular twist added by Johnson’s distancing effects draws attention to this submerged set of attitudes with a characteristic bluntness that could easily be mistaken for casual misogyny.

In considering the double-bind of objectification as both reductive and elevative, Julia Kristeva questions whether “the devalorisation of sex, dissociated, parcelised, marginalised, and in the final analysis degraded... be the condition for a phallic idealisation of Woman?” (163). Within the semantic registers of Johnson’s works there certainly lies evidence for this to be the case. In *Albert Angelo* we find a lengthy rumination upon the “heavily-beringed women of about thirty-five to be seen in many Angel pubs,” their wedding rings “a sign of pride, of aggressive non-availability” who “must see sex as in many ways condemning them to drudgery through children, and dread it because of this” (135). The lesson Albert takes from this is his need for “someone who realised instinctively about the necessity of the illusion of love” (135). The physical manifestation of outward signs of monogamy is enough to conjure imagery of unavailability, both to him and then sexually in general, which in turn leads Albert to desire an ideal woman who revels in the “illusion of love” rather than what could be considered its material reality. The key to this desire is again Johnson’s unstable self-image. What is desired is an investment which with regular contributions will pay out regularly – like a wage – and provide the security necessary for Hoggart’s all-important “self-respect”. The ultimate figure of this – following Kristeva’s analysis – lies in Johnson’s idealised mother-figure in *See the Old Lady Decently*. The two poems that make up most of the final two sections demonstrate this process of transaction with the mother-figure clearly:

Here
she said
I love you (138)

In this short poem we see the mother-figure offering her love. This can be read both as an act of physically giving love as an object – as in, “‘here’, she said, ‘I love you’” – or as a recollection from a certain place (“here”) wherein she once said that she loved him. The unity of these two meanings can be understood in the final lines of the novel constructed as poetry:

From
embryo
to embryon
from Em,
Me (139)

Here it is made clear that the mother-figure, as a giver of life, is simultaneously a historical point and a giver of love. The notion of security directing Johnson’s desire finds an ideal “lost Eden” origin point in his existence as “embryon”; mother Em and son Bryan within a single body that will go on to be severed into two opposing mirror-halves “EM” and “ME”. Within this construction it is evident that the “I love you” that is given is in fact only a substitute for the “Here” that was

originally an inseparable wholeness of lover and loved. Desire is a feeling directly comparable with loss and in giving love woman is very literally giving herself in an attempt to salve the initial wound of separation. The entire symbolic construction of love, desire, and the ideal Woman, is therefore yet another factor in Johnson's sense of rootlessness and "chaos" in a meaningless universe. Woman becomes another secure space that the self's survival depends on and has to be laboured for.

2.3: "Meritocracy" and Class Anxiety

At the heart of all of this turmoil over groupings, wages, women and, beneath it all, anxiety about social stability, can be seen the rising ideology of a new social system. Born largely from discourse about democratising elitist monolithic culture – allowing those that excel to rise – and later emphasising the rewards of individual "aspiration", the drive towards expanding access created in post-war welfare state Britain eroded class consciousness (if not actually class difference) in favour of a new "meritocracy". Perhaps aptly (or ironically) for such a postmodern ideological model, the original conceptualisation of "meritocracy" was a satire. Michael Young's 1958 *The Rise of the Meritocracy, 1870-2033*, described a future in which "intelligence and effort together make up merit (I + E = M)" (94). Perhaps in reaction to cross-party support for meritocratic principles, Young's satire appears to target the worries of all parts of the political spectrum: the meritocratic future sees the young usurping the old, individuals replacing families, both collective bargaining and inherited wealth are banned, all in the name of a society entirely structured around merit. Pre-Thatcher, many of the anti-social ideas inherent within ideas of "merit" as a signifier of worth remained scandalous and it is important to remember that the social changes that oriented society in that direction were conducted under a different set of ideological and economic imperatives.

Indeed, looking back on the post-war "movement of social engineering" as a failure to accomplish radical socialist change, Zygmunt Bauman emphasises that "the solution of problems so defined was never the goal pursued by the real forces that gave the reform its urgency and impetus"; for organised labour it was "the right to fight for the rising income of its members, not equality" (168) that drove change, whilst for the centre and right it was the continuation of Keynesian economic policy. The idea of creating "upward mobility" is positioned in direct opposition to the sort of working class community-based attitudes described in Hoggart as they can be seen to disrupt the basic stabilities supporting life without capital: job security, a secure marriage, and safety-in-numbers solidarity overall.

For Johnson the values of "the rising class" are held in the same contempt usually reserved for the Establishment proper. His most radical political work, *Christie Malry...* sees undertones of this contempt running through the way in which the Implied Author relates presents his characters. For "The Shrike's Old Mum", we are told that "it was all worth it, all those years of sacrifice, just to get my daughter placed in a respectable novel like this, you know. It's my crowning achievement" (156). The respectability only lasts until the end of the page wherein her daughter and Christie have to leave as "Sunday's the only day we have for a really long fuck" (157). The disposable nature of the Shrike and her Old Mum is all part of their direct relation to Christie's own aspirations in the form of his double-entry account with society. The greatest reward for aspiration is reserved for

Christie himself, however, as his quest ends when he “really [does] have everything... including cancer” (177). The very premise of Christie as a “cell of one” against society at large mimics much of the aspirational attitude. The opening page even introduces him in Hobbesian economic terms as one who must acquire money either through illegal methods which involve “unpleasant (and to him unacceptable) penalties” or else through “other methods not (somewhat arbitrarily) considered criminal by society” (11). Christie’s universe is not one bound by any recognisable morality other than the individual’s personal account with “THEM”; to quote Margaret Thatcher, “there is no such thing as society” – the individual must be in constant struggle against all others.

As with the anxieties described earlier, Johnson’s particular disdain, his strength of emotion, can be seen to originate in his own particular contradictory self-image; unable to be truly conscious of himself he “blows a fuse” and turns to the alienation device of ridicule. Johnson’s own notebooks are littered with soul searching about his own class position with notes such as this one from *Notebook 4*:

I am working-class but brought up not to mix with other w/c children – [therefore] I am not accepted either by my own class, or by others. I was always being told I was lucky as I had things my parents never had – this missing the point – no value to me (27).

The “lucky” one that moves out of the working class is doomed to wander between classes, accepted by no-one. It is the kind of thought that would often strike Johnson in tandem with observations about working class life; in this case some old men in a Putney pub, of whom he wonders whether they have “known each other since boyhood – or do they only seem to behave the same as ever!” (27). The sense of identity Johnson cultivates is that of the perpetual outsider: working class to the middle class, but within the working class he’s alone.

The “meritocratic” element of Johnson’s response to class alienation resides not in a notion of his accessing a “higher” class position but a more conservative notion of elite culture that, like the anti-bourgeois modernists described earlier, uses an alternative set of class-values to more “authentically” appreciate cultural works. Johnson’s earliest notebooks contain a number of notes regarding the plays he attended and poetry books he was to read – most of them of the high modernist variety of Eliot, Yeats and Pound. By *Notebook 4*, however, the class-consciousness separating his appreciation from that of the academy is becoming present. Of university he states that he “went to college – gained more specific knowledge of my heroes (ie. admired writers) and found they were not the men I thought they were” (30). In terms of the writers he still admired, it was the audience that he found disillusioning: “(Arts theatre – first week – hardly anyone there) A Pinter’s [sic] play ‘The Caretaker’ as curtain went up someone said ‘another kitchen sink!’” (148). Johnson finds himself excluded from the culture that would grant him “more specific knowledge” of “admired writers”, but then this culture is found to be one of bourgeois philistinism that would relegate anything from outside its small world of privilege to the status of “kitchen sink”. For Johnson, this was a result of his own unique experience which was potentially superior, but in all cases fundamentally different to that of his supposed fellows:

What I must realise about my university education is that it was ... a unique experience which must NOT be generalised about, at all costs. And no correlatives can be found for the people with whom I was contemporary at Kings (*Notebook 5*, 63).

What is appearing here is the central contradiction of post-social democratic “meritocratic” society. The expanded state and increased access to social provision removes individuals from traditionally static backgrounds and their cultural differences have to be resolved on an individual basis, in turn resulting in a particular distrust of the system that allowed them to supersede it. We see Johnson’s class position splitting into the two apparently contradictory aspects of existential self-reflection and socialistically-minded indignation that run throughout all of his works.

Just as publically provided education can be seen to inspire these feelings within Johnson in himself, so does he then project his feelings back upon the educational system that, for a brief period in the early sixties, he himself was employed in as a substitute teacher – subsequently novelised in the form of *Albert Angelo*. For the individualist Johnson, the very notion of education is the result of an artificial “need for man to impose a pattern on life” (133) and the systems by which it is conducted are “so desperately old-fashioned, of such very low productivity [with] the waste, and the ineffectual cosiness of... colleagues” (52) seemingly beyond repair. The maddening sensation of upholding a fatally flawed educational system clearly impacted Johnson, returning as the topic of his 1967 film *You’re Human Like the Rest of Them*, again featuring a teacher awash with existential despair. In *Albert Angelo*, however, this personal despair is countered by a political anger as, in solidarity with the children who “are being cheated, and they’re being treated as subhuman beings,” the speaker is unequivocal that “the school is a microcosm of society as a whole” (133) and “if the government wanted better education it could be provided easily enough, so I must conclude, again, that they specifically want the majority of children to be only partially educated” (176). In objective terms, Johnson’s intuition was right; “although numbers rose,” the percentage of working class children reaching university “did not rise significantly above the pre-existing figure of about 25%” in the post-war years, whilst “about one-third of the university intake” came from “various public, independent and direct grant schools” which catered to the richest 7% (Bartlett, 284). Essentially the “rising class” of university educated proletarians was expanding at the same rate that the university places for the privileged were expanding. There may be more room at the top, but the essential constitution of the top remained unchanged. The education system is therefore both of the things that individualist and collectivist Johnson levelled at it simultaneously; both inducing conformity and elitist – the two reinforcing each other. As a member of the working class, the system is set up against Johnson and his kind, but in realising its arbitrary nature he can conform sufficiently to its principles that he might beat the system. Interestingly, “beating the system” lies both at the heart of meritocratic capitalism and Gramscian organic intellectualism.

In Gramscian terms, however, the “system” as it exists in the current mode of production can be overtaken by a new class, yet for this class to survive and create its own ideological apologies it organically generates intellectuals that take the class’ premises as their own under the cover of objectivism. Existing intellectual groupings are seen as experiencing an “uninterrupted historical continuity” through their hegemonic class agreement that allows them to “put themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the dominant social group” (303). However, at the core of these premises lie “specialisations’ of partial aspects of the primitive activity of the new social type which the new class has brought into prominence” (302) –

liberalism, emerging from free market capitalism, takes private property as one of its first principles, for example. To extrapolate from Gramsci's theory the notion of class conditions informing organic intellectuals and apply it on a micro scale, the sense in which Johnson reinterprets through his particular class perspective can be identified with a positive rather than a negative intellectualism. In Johnson's words, from the first section of *The Unfortunates*, "I selected and elected to hear what I needed, what was of most use to me" (4). The grounds of Johnson's interpretive framework, having formed around a proletarian mode of being, differ from those of the Establishment from their very foundations, and so even if he adopts many ideas from the bourgeois ideological superstructure which surrounds him, Johnson does so on different, if not opposing, bases.

In *Trawl*, Johnson returns to memories of his childhood schooling as a means of understanding the class aspect to his distrust of power. He begins with an instance of being caught stealing fruit before briefly moving on a tangent in which he was accused of being a "THIEF and LIAR and CHEAT" (67) for stealing a Bible from another pupil's desk after someone else had stolen his. The lesson of the tangent was that although the young Johnson was in the right, "she [the teacher] had the power, ah, the power!" (67). From this lesson, the narrative then moves to the next assembly in which the headmaster complained of a pupil stealing fruit to eat – "it took some time before I realised he was talking about me. It was humiliating to realise it" (73). For Johnson, being used as an illustrative example of bad behaviour before the entire school, masked behind anonymity in order to appear as an objective correlative to badness in general, was a clear example of hypocritical "bourgeois offense. The class war again. They made me their enemy" (73). What the power structure of the school evoked for Johnson was the injustice of power and in order to defend himself against this he needed to reassure himself of the conditions by which he understood himself to be correct. Johnson describes the feeling as "anxiety about shame" (73); a sense that one does not know the codes by which those with power attribute shame, yet being fairly sure that marked differences between yourself and them – hunger, scruffiness – would be a likely signifier of shamefulness.

That Johnson goes on to enter the world of educators and the educated in spite of his "anxiety about shame" does not assume that education has done its job of socialising him, nor does it imply that Johnson himself successfully met the demands made of him, rather it indicates a means by which the internalised anxiety results in an outer toughness, authenticity and sincerity approximating the "self-respect" demanded of working class sensibility. For Bourdieu this anxiety is related to the autodidacticism by which the working class approach the bourgeois body of knowledge and, as a result, end up "ignorant of the right to be ignorant" that "educational entitlement" (329) confers. For Hoggart the psychological and intellectual effects of class "ignorance" are reinforced, or perhaps based in, a "physical appearance which speaks too clearly of his birth; he feels uncertain and angry inside when he realises that that, and a hundred habits of speech and manners, can 'give him away' daily" (301). As a member of the working class, the idea of altering behaviour to replicate the manners of the bourgeoisie is similarly repellent as nothing "inspires a feeling as strong as that aroused by the person who is putting on 'posh' airs" (86). The result is a desperate class anxiety in which, despite entering a typically bourgeois world (in Johnson's case the world of education and literature), one can never become a member. One cannot help "betraying" one's origins before the middle class, and yet cannot face "betraying" one's origins by attempting to alter this. As a result, the "rising class" must fall back upon working class notions of self-respect within middle class contexts.

2.4: Authenticity and Truth

Johnson's fourth notebook – mostly written during the period of his first entrance into the world of literature following *Travelling People* – demonstrates Johnson returning to questions of his class heritage with an obstinate sense of its own ambivalence. Quoting a television show called “Never Had it so Good” aired “(T.W. 10/3/60)”, he picks out the line “working class with money doesn't make you anything but working class” (115). That this line strikes Johnson with enough force for him to write it down indicates the way in which he would take possession of his class: in the face of the Establishment's use of “working class” as an insult, Johnson reclaims a deeper truth about authenticity in the act of transcribing the proof of their class hatred. He writes to himself how “there is no percentage in being an intellectual” (133), and fills his notebook with ideas for working class-themed works that revel in a sense of bawdiness commonly used as a disparaging stereotype by middle class caricaturists: “w/c poem – identification – the quick bonk on Saturday night After bath” (30), “Play about w/c life (uncut?) with lurking ballad singer?” (138). It is interesting that this willingness to engage with ideas of “working classness” emerges between *Travelling People* and *Albert Angelo* – the first being later declared a failure while the other is deeply concerned with verisimilitude. It could perhaps be suggested that Johnson's acceptance of himself as both working class and a novelist at the cutting edge of literary innovation marks the starts of the “authorised canon”, with *Travelling People* representing a petit bourgeois work that “betrays itself”.

A major way in which Johnson felt he “betrayed himself” within refined cultural surroundings was through his weight. Giles Gordon described him to Jonathan Coe as housing “huge insecurity within this vast, elephantine frame. This great figure who was sweating the whole time – it was like a sort of waterfall... I think he found his body quite difficult to live with” (391).[13] In fact, Johnson's “fatness” becomes a recurrent symbol within his works; sometimes referred to with a self-deprecating humour, such as the title of his film *Fat Man on a Beach*, and sometimes used quite cuttingly, as in some of the excerpts from his pupils presented in *Albert Angelo*: “Slobbery Jew you fat fomf you sippy rabbi. you are a dog” (162), or the origin of the Coe biography's title, “he walks like a fiery elephant” (160). In the section of *The Unfortunates* which begins “Yates's is friendly...”, Johnson decides to sit upstairs in the pub and hopes no one will notice his unusual action. Upon approaching the stairs he is met by a mirrored reflection of himself – “St Bernard face...overweight, no, fat” – which becomes a direct embodiment of his social anxiety as he moves “through these contented people, not a single one noticing my fatness, or me” (3): the self is appended as an afterthought.

Taking Johnson's fatness as a physical metaphor for his inability to conform to middle class refinements of taste, it can almost be considered that Johnson's obsession with eighteenth century scatological humour – Swift, Sterne, and (although not mentioned, a perfect intertext) Smollett – is a form of anti-bourgeois protest. Just as he appropriated the modernist avant garde's aristocratic protest for proletarian means, the aristocratic values of opulence, overabundance and *jouissance* flow through Johnson's pastiches. In “Broad Thoughts from a Home”, collected in *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?*, parodic poetry such as “crap is crap is crap is crap” is produced by the overfed, piles-ridden Samuel in a celebration of haughtiness, extravagance and the “filthy minded readers” (94) that take pleasure in it. In his seventh notebook Johnson similarly writes down an

idea for a story in which a “Fat man who numbers his layers of fat by great meals he has had in the past... tells them to Dr. on death bed” (65). By returning to an aristocratic rendering of obesity as associated with positive traits such as opulence and conspicuous consumption, Johnson is challenging the reading presented under capitalism’s ideology of the “protestant work ethic” which associates being overweight with laziness and gluttony. In these flights of humour Johnson is owning his body and celebrating his physical presence in a hyperbolic manner that rings out defiant against what is expected of him.

Alan Burns, in his short piece “You’re Human Like the Rest of Us” in which he recalls his friendship with Johnson, uses this “larger than life” aspect of Johnson as synonymous with his physicality, his work and his personality. Quoting Bryan Cole, he describes how Johnson “cossetted his grossness with a gourmet’s self-indulgence... He was not particularly tall, but he bulled large. He was broad, huge arms and thighs. Orson Welles had the same bulk, similar features, and the same intensity too” (159). The “intensity” of Johnson is portrayed as heroic, superhuman. The drinks bill when working on his film *Fat Man on a Beach* is described as “gigantic, expenses generally were monumental. At one stage we had to conceal them under ‘Hire of Boat’” (162). In his short remembrance, “Bryan”, Zulfikar Ghose too writes of Johnson’s unbelievable squash playing abilities: “it was remarkable to see that body, always so heavy and seemingly without a potential for energetic motion when he was seated, deploy itself with such speed on the court. More often than not, he won” (24). That both of these close colleagues (and many of those interviewed by Coe) feel compelled to invest Johnson’s weight with a semi-mystical potency perhaps indicates the extent to which Johnson’s own Rabelaisian awareness of the bodily could become contagious.

The kind of carnivalesque celebration which Johnson revels in is not one that will shift attitudes, nor is it one which aims to – it is more along the lines of a refusal to accept the ideological imperatives that society would impose upon him. What is being seen in these lesser known works is reflecting one particular eccentricism of Johnson’s overall iconoclastic approach to literature. The self-consciousness and compensating audaciousness of Johnson’s attitude to his weight reflects the same drives he displays when discussing the great Johnsonian bugbear of “truth”. Similar to “experimental”, “truth” was a term that Johnson himself could never ruminate upon in a manner acceptably academic – appearing more as an emotional plea for authenticity in the face of academic sophism. His most expansive reading of it appears in the essay giving its name to the collection *Aren’t You Rather Young to be Writing your Memoirs?*, the ubiquity of which in readings of Johnson has seen it, in White’s words, “almost become B.S. Johnson, in his absence” (85). Not only is the writer compelled to tell the truth if they are to practice in good faith, but “I would go further and say that to the extent a reader can impose his own imagination on my words, then that piece of writing is a failure” (“Aren’t You Rather...”, 28). For Johnson, questions of “truth” in literature then group together a number of debates around verisimilitude, form, language, content, mimesis, and the role of the author and place them all within a seemingly intuitive black-and-white binary of authenticity. That Johnson’s application of his truth-mantra overlaps so many questions commonly distinct within academic discourse could very well be why Johnson had such little success developing it beyond a kind of rebel truism – or a “truth of my truth”.

As we did with Johnson's variable use of metafictional technique, it will benefit our reading of Johnson's return to the idea of "truth" to witness the different attitudes taken to it between novels. Its most striking appearance within Johnson's fiction is in *Albert Angelo* where it serves as a narratological conclusion in the form of a metafictional "disintegration" of story. The tone is exasperated, running in one long sentence without punctuation; "fuck all this lying look what im [sic] really trying to write about is writing not all this stuff about architecture.... Im trying to say something not tell a story telling stories is telling lies and I want to tell the truth about me about my experience about my truth" (167). This is the Johnson who is a nightmare for one hoping for an explanation; rambling, evasive, outspoken and exasperated with what he sees yet incapable of properly explaining his exact meaning. Yet this is not the only tone in which Johnson addresses the question of "truth" in his novels. In *Christie Malry...* the question of the reader's imagination – one that seems to exasperate the Johnson of "Aren't you rather..." – is conscripted into comedic service as the author figure accuses the reader of "investing [his characters] with characteristics quite unknown to me, or even at variance which such description I have given!" (51), before granting a set of allowed freedoms to the reader imagining Christie: "You are allowed complete freedom in the matter of warts and moles particularly; as long as he has at least one of either" (51). Here we have ideas of "truth" and reader response used with a Sterne-like sense of irony – revelling in the "chaos" (to use another Johnson term) that is attributed both to literature and a life "without meaning". This cosmic irony is both tragic as well as comic, however, as is made clear in the "Last" section of *The Unfortunates* when Johnson considers "but for his illness, death, it seems probably to me that [he and Tony] might have grown further and further apart, he becoming more academic, I less and less believing academic criticism had any value at all, perhaps saying to him in anger Let the dead live with the dead!" (4). Tony's death, ruminated upon throughout *The Unfortunates* as sitting between meaninglessness and personal meaning – the "truth of my truth" – is validated within the novel only by Johnson's authorial command over it. The questions and debates around "truth" that separated Johnson from his academic friend are resolved by death, just as in *Christie Malry...* they are laughed away as a joke and in *Albert Angelo* collapse into narrative "disintegration". Evoked in mourning, laughed at and evaded, "truth" seems to become directly associated with the Real in a Lacanian sense; imperative to a subject's sense of the world's cohesion but harrowing, if not impossible to view directly. If we were to attempt to place Johnson's thinking within the traditions of continental philosophy, Lacan would present a tempting answer to Johnson's particular irresolvable ontology.

However, it is not enough simply to consider Johnson's "truth" as a naïve synonym for Lacan's "Real". Not only would this reduce Johnson to evidence in the case for Lacan's unfalsifiable project, but it would also tell us nothing about Johnson and return us to the bourgeois position from which he appears to lack the necessary education and verbosity to engage in literary debate of merit. By drawing a comparison with Lacan's Real, we are rather tackling a question of ideological difference and the role that "truth" plays in Johnson's position as working class literary innovator. If "truth" does take the position of an absent imperative then each of Johnson's narratives represent an ideological allegory journeying towards that imperative. The class aspect of this ideological-cultural production is identified by Tew in his Johnson monograph when he writes that "formal experimentalism serves to function as an ongoing perceptual

recognition of the nature of things, for reality and consequently truth lie at the heart of the enterprise that moves toward a perception of the concrete and material" (11). Johnson's revelatory mode of literary experimentalism privileges "truth" in an anti-academic manner in a violent materialist break from idealism. That his innovations are "directed specifically towards an idea of greater verisimilitude" (Tew, 11) identifies a key distrust of totalising texts and drives the reader toward the material which, like Lacan's Real, can never be reached by the author-figure but can only be approached and directed towards. Functionally, this materialist alienation is conducted in the manner of the physical book as a "constant reminder", described by White as something that "ultimately strikes against the homogenisation of representation and any critically sanctioned surrender to the economy of perception which assimilates texts only to other texts, not texts to life" (117). The truth-imperative is untheorised by necessity as it acts as a call to authenticity and sincerity regarding material conditions beyond the textual. Johnson's materialism is embodied in the "blown fuse" of narrative collapse. The self-perpetuating engines of elite culture are being dismantled from within.

The imperative towards "truth" is not only important due to its role in creating Johnson's particular materialist metatextuality, but also on account of its class-cultural sentiment. The "defiant moral courage" (314) that it seems to summarise – far more than any theoretical inclination – returns us to Hoggart's study and another of the virtues central to working class ideology beside self-respect; sincerity. Sincerity is relied on "precisely because it does give some sort of measure in a world where measure is otherwise very difficult to find" (195). As a virtue, sincerity places value in the subject in absence of any claims to objectivity. Johnson's "truth of my truth" can be seen to follow this; implying that academic claims to objectivity are often actually institutionalised subjective values reinforcing a bourgeois Establishment. Sincerity links Johnson's many statements on the importance of innovation within literature too. Alongside the paradigm of truth-seeking in the introduction to *Aren't You Rather...*, Johnson lists those "writing as though it mattered" – their works representing an effort, rather than being praiseworthy in themselves – as well as suggesting that the attempt to write in good faith is also central to the social good as the traditionalist "cannot legitimately or successfully embody present-day reality in exhausted forms" (16). For Johnson, the novelist, "if he [sic] is serious, will be making a statement which attempts to change society towards a condition he conceives to be better, and he will be making at least implicitly a statement of faith in the evolution of the form in which he is working" (16). Social concern, concern for literature as a form, and personal integrity are united in the act of writing "as though it mattered" and, as such, demand a level of sincerity that is of-itself valuable beyond academic formalisations of quality and is rather "true" on the grounds of being the most authentic that it is possible to be.

2.5: Turning Towards Terror

With these insights into Johnson's particular working class experimentalism in mind, we may now begin to look again at his most outwardly political novel, *Christie Malry...*, and reconsider some of the tensions latent within it that are also present within the archive material. In my paper, "Cell of One" (2014), I read *Christie Malry...* as a culmination of a

political journey into radicalism that encapsulates both B.S. Johnson's own life trajectories and wider cultural-economic trends within post-war Britain. As well as the economic downturn, conservative government and the Industrial Relations Act, aspects foremost in my own reading of Johnson's radicalisation, Coe's biography also traces a series of insights around this period that create for Johnson the impression that, as Zulfikar Ghose wrote to him in a letter dated 22nd June 1970, "the dark ages are approaching, mate". Coe describes how in 1969, Johnson staged a screening of *Paradigm*, one of his most typically "avant garde" films featuring a character moving through stages of life speaking an invented language. The "young, highly politicised audience, in the aftermath of the wave of student unrest which have swept through Europe" proceeded to greet the film with "boos and catcalls" (263). Faced by this kind of humiliation due to a perceived bourgeois pretentiousness, Johnson's film-making never quite returns to the highly conceptual material like *Paradigm* that had earlier won him high praise.

In fact, Johnson's television plays of 1971 see a return to autobiographical material in *Not Counting the Savages* and, most interestingly considering *Christie Malry...*, a piece about a member of a "dedicated minority nationalist movement" (319) released after imprisonment for terrorism entitled *What is the Right Thing and am I Doing it?*. The climax of the film sees Ghent, the terrorist figure, approaching the offices of a newspaper with a suitcase implied to be filled with explosives. In the climactic reveal, the editor throws the case from the window only for it to be filled with pieces of paper - "Ghent's poetic output" - which, for Coe at least, implies that it is literature which is the "real incendiary device" (321). Considering *Christie Malry...* ends with a seemingly opposite message - "you shouldn't be writing novels about it, you should be out there bloody doing something about it" (180) - we can perhaps also take from the film the message that attempts to write a radical, oppositional literature will be metaphorically as well as literally "thrown out of the window" by the literary Establishment. In such a manner both *What is the Right Thing...* and *Christie Malry...* share the theme of fatalistic radical commitment in the face of despair.

In Johnson's researches during this period - those which make their way into both of these works - the attraction to terrorist figures as both alienated from society and yet powerfully immersed within it can be seen to explain much of Johnson's reticence in recognising any explicitly political potential in books. In an interview with Alan Burns in *The Imagination on Trial* he talks of how "in England I don't think books can change anything. Here if you want to change things you've got to throw bombs or work through Parliament" (88). Essentially Johnson is eschewing belief in working class political organisation here and reducing the roles of "us and them" to the "them" of the Establishment in parliament and the "us" of the individual divided from society. The product of "meritocracy" that sees Johnson "stuck between classes" is embodied in a political distrust of collectivism and an elevation of self-respect and personal commitment to the level of total renunciation of others. Looking at Johnson's notes concerning the ideal Urban Guerrilla ("UG") transcribed by Coe we see many of the earlier aspects of Johnson's attitudes to "self-respect" transformed into combat tactics; "The UG must live by his work or professional activity," like Johnson's attitude to his career - "The UG must be very searching and knowledgeable about the area in which he lives or operates", like Johnson's literary use

of space to encapsulate his “truth” – and “The UG should... expropriate capitalist funds” (317), as Johnson managed through his entry into literary councils and funding bodies. Johnson’s fascination with The Angry Brigade, and their role in inspiring *Christie Malry...* described in my paper, could perhaps be explained by this radical reimagining that Johnson was undertaking, rather than any particular attraction to the libertarian communist ideals of the terrorist group itself. The “cell of one” against “Them” was better expressed by total outsiders than by class interests.

Yet Johnson’s reading of “Them” could not be more typically working class in its origins. Hoggart describes how working class community solidarity arises “partly from the feeling that the world outside is strange and often unhelpful, that it has most of the counters stacked on its side, that to meet it on its own terms is difficult. One may call this... the world of ‘Them’” (72). Tew, in his monograph, identifies Johnson’s fullest description of the class dynamic in his childhood reminiscences in *Trawl* where he writes that “the class war is being fought as viciously and destructively of human spirit as it has ever been in England: I was born on my side, and cannot and will not desert” (53). For Tew, this revelatory moment and its material setting are inextricably linked as “the vocabulary of the reminiscence matches the wartime circumstances of the memory, providing an irony with its suggestion of a deeper, ongoing supplementary conflict” (95). The war against Germany may have taken the young Johnson out of his working class London surroundings, but only to land him on the wrong side of a different conflict – deep behind enemy lines in the British class war. In a way this represents much of Johnson’s relationship with the British middle class during his later years; given access to their surroundings in going to university and having his novels published, yet never truly being one of them.[14]

Following the argument that Johnson’s own infatuation with terrorism can be taken as a reflection of his own uncomfortable position “between classes”, it is possible to read a certain prehistory of *Christie Malry...* through Johnson’s notebooks which will tell us a lot about this novel as a work both intensely radical and fatalistically self-defeating in intent. As Coe writes in his biography, the initial ideas for Johnson’s novels often appear a number of years before he sets about writing or even planning to write them. In the case of *Christie Malry...* the initial plan can be seen to appear on page 51 of Johnson’s seventh notebook, placing it sometime after 1964. However, going back to Johnson’s fifth notebook - begun in the early sixties as he is beginning to return to his working class heritage with the most enthusiasm – there appears an entry entitled “Interview with Father Joe 6/5/63” which seems to act as a precursor to the later plan.[15] A hundred pages before the interview, what appears to be the idea for conducting it is written down;

Now – consciously working-class – eating fish and chips by the river, throwing bones and skin to the swans – eager to know about my father’s youth – talk his language to him instead of revolting out (61).

During a rumination on class and his place within it, Johnson turns to his father as a figure of both authority and authenticity on such matters. That Johnson’s father was called “Stanley” suggest that the interview with “Father Joe” may have been conducted with a “father figure” to save Johnson from addressing his actual father with such questions. Johnson’s notes reflect aspects of his own politics that are perhaps notable to him for existing in the working class contrary to the beliefs of middle class liberals; ideas like “no colour prejudice” and that to “need someone to follow” is a “naïve attitude” (168). He also comments on one of Johnson’s personal

favourite topics, housing, suggesting that “People respond to better housing. Evil comes to evil – like rats to a dead body” (167). Following a comment that the “state should look after” those “weak in the head” (167) there is the general idea that they “got sloppy with Welfare State” (168); perhaps reflecting a conservative view but, judging by the context, more likely suggesting that Labour did not go far enough. Then, the page after this encounter with working class socialist sentiments, Johnson writes the idea: “Story of Father Joe type who goes mad + starts blowing up slums?” (169). Is this reaction Johnson’s own impatience with politics projected onto someone else in the form of “going mad”, or is it a sign of his alienation from the working class that casts it as self-defeating; “blowing up slums”? Either way, the explosive class-war imagination of B.S. Johnson seems to have its roots in the same class ambivalence as much of his writing and experience, albeit at the extreme end of his emotional scale. Perhaps we can then consider Johnson’s attraction to the motif of terrorism as equal and opposite to his attraction to modernist fragmentation; faced by bourgeois rootlessness he responds with a “blown fuse”, faced by proletarian despair he responds with a lit fuse.

Conclusion

In conclusion, when we consider B.S. Johnson as a working class experimental writer and a product of the post-war welfare state many of the contradictions which exist within his writing cease to be purely formal but rather embed him within his historical moment. By investigating the relevance of class within Johnson’s works we are provided not only with a clearer perspective on the works themselves but upon the Johnsonian experimental drive as a potentially liberatory aesthetic. The radical reorientation of form in the direction of an authentic contemporary experience represents an imperative shared by all of the Sixties Experimental Novelists. It is Johnson’s characteristic bluntness, however, that makes him both the primary spokesperson and favoured scapegoat for critics wishing to engage with non-traditional post-war writing without having to face the very real challenges that it poses to the traditions of the British literary establishment.

Chapter 3: “Without Taboos There Can Be No Tragedy”: Spectres of War and Rituals of Peace in the Work of Eva Figs

3.1 Eva Figs as a Post-War Writer

The consequences of the Second World War loomed large over the Sixties in a variety of ways. The founding of the Welfare State had established a social democratic consensus in national politics which radically altered many people's lives for the better. By the same token, the Cold War and the legacy of the atom bomb daily threatened those same people with nuclear apocalypse. The wartime practice of rationing food was only completely ended in 1954 when meat became freely available and conscription – or “National Service” as it was dubbed in peacetime – only came to an end in 1960, with the last conscripts being released in 1963. Philip Tew, in *The Contemporary British Novel*, addresses the importance of the war on literature, suggesting that, “The literary culture which dominated English life since the mid-Victorian period... survived intact until the Second World War” (8). As well as direct responses to “post-war” conditions, such as the B.S. Johnson-edited collection *All Bull: The National Servicemen*, the lingering impact of world conflict retains a latent power throughout Sixties culture. The extent to which that power is felt among the subjects of this thesis, however, is dependent upon the writer in question.

As a shared context, “post war” is a difficult term to apply to the experimental novelists of the Sixties biographically. Ann Quin, for example, was only nine years old in 1945 whilst Christine Brooke-Rose was working in Bletchley Park. B.S. Johnson writes in *Trawl* and *The Evacuees* of the trauma caused to him by evacuation during wartime, whilst Eva Figes' 1978 reflections on her wartime experiences are unashamedly titled *Little Eden*. The sense of novelty that J.G. Ballard sought to evoke in his many discussions of the war as a watershed moment in the Western cultural imagination can be seen to position later developments under the shadow of that event. Indeed, the simple description of these novelists as “post-war writers” immediately raises a number of questions not only about what role the war played in these writers' imaginations, but what role it played in the national imagination at that time as well, and even if such generalisations are possible with any amount of accuracy.

The “generation gap” is one of the most widely returned to tropes in Sixties culture. Partly this emphasis on new “youth movements” serves to draw attention to a new form of consumerism permitted by post-war prosperity by which an increase in disposable income encouraged experiments in living patterns, or “lifestyle”. However, it also draws attention to the lingering effect of austerity (and its incumbent uniformity) upon the national imagination; a break from which is symbolised by the “youth” upon whom a sense of decadence and irresponsibility was projected. In the volume of her memoirs entitled *Walking in the Shade*, Doris Lessing recounts this Britain of “the late 1940s, the early 1950s [which] has vanished, and now it is hard to believe it existed... No cafes. No good restaurants. Clothes were still ‘austerity’ from the war, dismal and ugly. Everyone was indoors by ten, and the streets were empty” (122). It is against this “excessive” uniformity that the “excessive” exuberance of the Sixties can be seen to rebel. Above any concrete and material differences between generations, however, the overarching importance of the “generation gap” is its ability, as a symbolic discourse, to impose itself upon all topics of debate. The two concepts of the “generation gap” and the “post-war” resonate with highly emotive and conflicting implications within the Sixties cultural imagination. In public discourse the “older generation” are caricatured as backward and set in their ways and the “younger generation” as ungratefully reaping the rewards of wartime sacrifice. In order to engage with the radical aspirations of Sixties

culture in Britain, it is therefore necessary to discuss “The War” and the long shadow it casts over British society.

Among the writers studied in this thesis, the war’s most dramatic impact can be felt in the work of Eva Figes. Figes is a writer of memoirs and critical studies as well as novels, many of which engage with the Second World War; *Little Eden* (1978), *Tales of Innocence and Experience* (2004), and *Journey to Nowhere* (2008) all directly relating her and her family’s experiences as Jews that fled Berlin for Britain in 1939, while in 1993 she edited the collection *Women’s Letters in Wartime, 1450-1945* dealing with women’s wartime experiences across history. Although these works are published much later than her early experimental novels, the many distinct attitudes, interests and experiences elaborated within them draw upon a common root which holds true throughout her literary career.

In concentrating specifically upon Eva Figes’ work in the Sixties, it is necessary to first understand the rationale by which she approached her experimental aesthetic. Although outspoken in her rejection of “experimental” as a label for her novels, she nevertheless positioned herself as part of a group attempting to do something new with the novel. Looking back in 1985, she lists B.S. Johnson, Ann Quin and Alan Burns as fellow members of this group with “very different talents and preoccupations, but we shared a common credo, a common approach to writing” (“B.S. Johnson”, 70). Never fully elaborated in a theoretical or manifesto form, Figes’ approach revolves around the discovery “that life was not conscious, that the novels of the past were portraying a false reality” (*Imagination on Trial*, 33). The effects of this unconsciousness appear in an unpublished and undated piece, “Prosaic”, written roughly during this period, in which Figes laments “we have outgrown ourselves. Sit, bored and alienated, watching astronauts float about in black space on television”.^[16] Against this malaise, Figes proposed a new form of writing which would “make a direct emotional impact [and] break through the rational prose structures” (*Imagination on Trial*, 35). For Figes, such innovation was necessary, not only in terms of the future of literature and culture, but also for society. In order to change society, one had to change perception, and it is in this interest that Figes believed aesthetic formal innovation played a central role; “We need new statements. New models of reality... I have found myself increasingly involved in making new connections, creating new networks... I am using a different grid” (“Note”, 114). In the experimental novels of Eva Figes, perception and reality are fundamentally bound together by imposed structures, and it is a prerequisite of any authentic work that it encounters these structures on its own terms, negotiates and reworks them. It is in relation to these revolutionary “new models” that the works of Eva Figes, at first glance strikingly poetic, are by the same measure deeply political as well.

3.2: Eva Figes’ Anthropological Feminism

When engaging Eva Figes as a political, experimental novelist in the context of the (Long) Sixties, it is impossible not to mention her critical positioning within the feminist canon. Published in 1970, chronologically central to the novels studied here, her academic work *Patriarchal Attitudes* was, and arguably remains, Figes’ most famous work. Alongside Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch*, Figes’ polemic has come to define the “Second Wave” of British feminism which exploded into prominence in 1970.

Subsequent reviews of her novels tend to identify her primarily as a feminist writer. When writing her bio for *Twentieth-Century British and Irish Fiction*, Juliette Wells concentrates on her “steady interest in representing the experience of both ordinary and extraordinary women [that] places her among the most important feminist novelists of the late twentieth century” (124). Friedman and Fuchs name her next to Gertrude Stein, Christine Brooke-Rose and Kathy Acker as “undermining the patriarchal assumptions that inform [traditional] narrative modes” (4) in their book *Breaking the Sequence: Women’s Experimental Fiction*. Indeed, the premise of their book, that “the rupturing of traditional forms becomes a political act, and the feminine narrative resulting from such rupture is allied with the feminist project” (4), provides perhaps the strongest framework for reading Figes’ experimental novels in literary criticism so far, in spite of the study itself focusing upon her work directly only occasionally. This relationship between structure and politics is especially relevant when we consider the positions taken in feminist discourse not just by Figes herself, but by much of the Long Sixties feminist movement.

In a short essay analysing the development of feminism post-1945, Pat Thane identifies Figes’ contemporaries as proponents of “a more radical strand of feminism” (204). The beginnings of this new wave of activism are seen to emerge from other radical movements during 1968 including “the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign and various socialist organisations”. By 1969 “there were 70 local women’s liberation groups in London” and by 1970, “the first national Women’s Liberation Workshop, held in Oxford...drew 600 delegates” (204). Once Eva Figes’ book *Patriarchal Attitudes* had become associated with a central group of representative texts in both reviews of contemporary feminism and Eva Figes’ works, the connection itself then became a staple of Figes’ own novels’ covers, in turn encouraging this identification. A telling review by Michael P. Fogarty appearing in the *Catholic Herald* and focusing on “feminism today” in 1973, positioned Figes’ book next to books by Germaine Greer, Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, Juliet Mitchell, and others as works forming a new “movement”. The novel idea at the centre of this movement is, in Fogarty’s words, “if the network of social relationships in the community and the extended family, which traditionally took the strain and isolation out of the nuclear family is being weakened or dissolved, what new social as well as family structures shall we put in its place?” (152). Although writing “as a Catholic”, Fogarty nevertheless identifies the structuralist aspect that these new analyses bring to ideas such as social and family “breakdown”. Such a concentration upon structural inequalities is in keeping with the social democratic mode of political discourse hegemonic in Britain during the Sixties. Debates were framed around “the Role of Women”, implying a certain paternalist perspective, whilst demands surrounding equal pay, liberalised legislation and NHS support inevitably involve the discourses of a managed economy.

In *Patriarchal Attitudes*, the success of Figes’ political intervention into debates surrounding structural inequality, both economic and cultural, is to demonstrate how such inequalities are deeply rooted in Western culture, their forms and features shifting through time but an essential patriarchal undercurrent remaining throughout. The difference between this approach and that of the women’s rights movements of the older generation could perhaps be demonstrated in the legislation regarding women’s issues during the respective periods as collected by Cook and Stevenson. Where 1945’s Family Allowances Act, alongside the provision of free healthcare by the NHS in 1948, could be considered victories for women in terms of redistributing wealth around the nuclear family

hierarchy, the Abortion Act (1967), Family Planning Act (1967), Divorce Act (1969), Equal Pay Act (1970), and Sex Discrimination Act (1975) provide material and legislative bolsters towards the liberation of women from the material foundations of the hierarchy itself.

Other than positioning her as part of the contemporary feminist movement, considering the structuralist influences in Figes' feminist writing can perhaps also allow us to reflect on the construction of her characters and the fictional worlds inhabited by them within her novels. In a 1988 interview with Laurel Graeber, Figes refused to classify her novels as feminist, suggesting that she is "more concerned with women's emotions. Women don't stop feeling vulnerable because of feminism"(9). However, considering the determinism implicit in much of Figes' feminist polemical works – one particularly potent example being that, "at some stage a woman has to make a choice between her own ambition and her marriage, and in the eyes of society there is in fact only one choice to be made. A girl of fifteen knows both about the choice and what the answer is" (*Patriarchal Attitudes*, 171) – women's emotional responses to the concrete restraints of society is itself a form of politicised despair through implication. Where some feminist writers of the period, most notably Angela Carter, would place an emphasis upon strong female characters as a means of disrupting patriarchal literary expectations, Figes concentrates upon depicting her characters as historical subjects. Featuring both male and female protagonists, her novels are careful delineations of character, place and time – aspects amalgamated through the experience of perception. While Figes' characters retain the total psychological depth one would expect of a modernist stream-of-consciousness writer, they also – through memory, dream, and metaphor – display the manner in which they are historically constituted as political subjects. A key historical parallel with this aspect of Figes' writing can be found in the early 1970s project of feminist anthropology. Drawing upon the methodology of contemporary ethnographic studies as a basis for studying women's position within Western society, the strength of such an academic project lay in its similar ability to demonstrate the historical conditions informing the present moment. As a result, patriarchal society is shown to be contingent, not fixed.

One example of feminist anthropology can be seen in Ann Oakley's 1972 study *Sex, Gender and Society*. Oakley collects a number of anthropological cases as the basis of a feminist argument against patriarchal expectations of gender roles. The questions she asks are, "What generalisations can be made about the rules for allocating tasks and roles by sex? And what rules are made in practice by differing societies, including our own?", with the result that "as each assumption is taken in turn, the appearance of biological necessity comes to seem more mythical than real" (131). From the almost indeterminable biological differences between genders in foetuses, to the Mbuti for whom "the role of biology as a determinant of social role and status seem negligible" (149), and the Kikuyu whose men "spend most of their time in crafts and other activities" (141) whilst women perform the "traditionally masculine" labour roles; Oakley presents one of the most comprehensive collections of social variants within her contemporary feminist discourse and, like Figes in *Patriarchal Attitudes*, uses this to dispute patriarchal claims of biologically inherent gender roles.

For Figes, this use of anthropology in feminism represents western society "just...beginning to realise the enormous importance of environment, not only with regard to men

and women, but with regard to one human being and another" (*Patriarchal Attitudes*, 15). However, the central theme of her book is not that Enlightenment Reason will allow women to liberate themselves through the academic demonstration of their equality, but rather that the "environment" which shapes "one human being and another" historically will find a means of shaping contemporary discourse to fit with patriarchal attitudes, not vice versa. "The attitudes are adapted, but remain fundamentally what they had been for generations", she writes, whilst "even highly able and original minds will continue to justify a state of affairs which is advantageous" (111). Robert Fraser, addressing the problem of anthropology itself being shaped to fit discourse, writes in the introduction to James George Fraser's *The Golden Bough*, "taboos are fences around cultures, guide-posts to provinciality, definitions of belonging and place... they inform us, whether through inclusion or else through exclusion, of who we are" (x). It is a similar argument to Figes' and one that would account for the disparities between uses of anthropology which threaten to undermine particularly polemical approaches such as Oakley's. For example, Jung's anthropological formulation of literature compares it to "the men's councils and totum clans [that] preserve the knowledge, and it is handed down to the younger men in the rites of initiation" (113) – a function Figes' novels can perhaps be read antithetically against – whilst Woolf, a noted inspiration for Figes, compares official church and state regalia, "pieces of metal, or ribbon, coloured hoods or gowns, [to] a barbarity which deserves the ridicule which we bestow upon the rites of savages" (179).[17] Even in the Levi-Strauss inspired area of anthropology-related linguistics Christine Brooke-Rose and Umberto Eco find language to be respectively socially variable and intrinsically gendered (*Invisible Author*). The line that Figes takes in *Patriarchal Attitudes* that, in the field of discourse, anthropology may provide examples but never answers, could therefore be considered an important variation on the theme of feminist anthropology. Similarly, it is through the lens of a historically constituted model of society that we can return to Figes' experimental intention to outline "new models of reality" and create "new networks" through her stylistic and formal innovation. Figes' experimental works can be seen as exercises of consciousness-raising through alterations in the mode of presentation.

Figes, in pursuing new modes, seems at times to be consciously playing with the masculine tradition of psychological discourse. The romantic relationship between the protagonist's daughter and doctor in *Days* utilises the imagery of "mysterious" (62) love, emotions that "weighed like a lead ball... in my chest" (61). Her lover, the object of those desires, is described as "like my father, being a man, imponderable... there was something about the breed I had not reckoned with till now" (62). Framed by the masculine tradition and its clichéd Freudian interpretations, the supposedly natural romantic ruminations of the young woman seem to be reflecting literary conventions rather than spontaneous emotion. The pseudo-anthropological imagery becomes far more emphasised in relation to the mother figure. Sat in her hospital bed engaging in reveries of her own, she nevertheless becomes "some sort of monument, a statue. A stiffened lap figure in a perpetual sitting posture, arms deprived of hands, extensions of wood which are able to accept but not touch, not hold, not grasp" (92). Suggesting "primitivist" sculpture of the Henry Moore variety, Figes is drawing on tribal imagery but with a retained awareness of how such imagery is processed and filtered into Western culture. The "eternal figure with brave shoulders but no head. Mother, woman, as man

has carved her out of wood or stone” (92) exists as a great inactive monolith, both in physical appearance and as a symbol of motherhood. The relationships between these characters are redirected through the symbolic structures that give them social meaning as archetypes, rather than living organisms. The weight of social expectations intervenes between relationships and asserts a patriarchal dynamic.

Figes enlists the imagery of the “primitive” as a key poetic device for imprinting history into her otherwise contemporary narratives in serious ways as well. The most protracted example of this technique opens the novel *Konek Landing*; “it began where the tide ran,” she writes, “the water rocking, air and water and air; there, you might say, the cradle of life” (9). Beginning a novel ostensibly about the genocidal condition of wartime Europe with the beginning of life itself places the rest within an uncomfortable yet sublime perspective. Before the end of the first paragraph we reach, “creatures with legs to carry them moved up the beach and stayed there” (10), by the second we have, “a four-legged creature pulled himself upright on two legs, tottered but balanced finally, and swung himself into the safety of the trees” (11), before the third paragraph introduces a man “left...alone to find his way back with two pin-points of light” (12). Stylistically, the fixation upon the minutiae of moving water across a beach does much to suggest Wells’ comparison of Figes’ prose to Woolf’s; from this perspective one could arguably read the introduction as an exercise in modernist stream-of-consciousness describing the mental state of one inspired by their surroundings. However, reading this as an actual description of the history of life until the point at which the protagonist, Stefan Konek, is stood upon the beach does more than create a poetical distancing of the mind but rather inspires an existential panic that emphasises both a grandness of scale and also an insignificance by comparison. There is a sense in which Figes’ interest in anthropological history – a history of humanity’s deepest structures - is no mere fuel for rhetoric, but a despairing realisation that the weight of history is greater than the rational mind and the cause-and-effect logic of current events.

Anthropological history not only features in Figes’ novels as a powerful metaphor, however, as could perhaps be said of these two examples, but arguably lies central to the imaginative frameworks Figes is using to construct her free-flowing narratives. Her thoughts on the interrelationship of social relations and historical structures are most firmly voiced in her 1976 work of literary criticism, *Tragedy and Social Evolution*. In this study, Figes brings many of her ideas from *Patriarchal Attitudes* to bear upon another critical tradition: the history of tragedy. Although the work engages with Aristotle, Sophocles and Shakespeare with a careful eye to unpacking their archetypal patriarchal themes, its central underlying argument posits tragedy and its narrative structures as inherently linked to human social rituals dating back into prehistory. The argument is remarkably similar to Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* at many points, in spite of the philosopher’s name being mentioned only twice in the book - and then only to highlight the rampant misogyny driving his arguments. But Nietzsche’s attribution of tragedy’s power to “the ecstatic sound of the Dionysiac revels [echoing] ever more enticingly around this world built on illusion and moderation” (26), with “its constant conflicts and only periodically intervening reconciliations” (14) reflecting “the reproduction of the species [dependant] on the duality of the sexes” (14) is equally present in Figes’ study, albeit approached from a critical position. As a study, *Tragedy and Social Evolution* describes the subtextual implications of tragedy as distinct formulations of pre-rational thought patterns. It verges on Freud’s

description of an archaic “omnipotence of thoughts” wherein “relations which hold between the ideas of things are deemed to hold equally between the things themselves” (99) – the fatalism that drives tragic narrative is more powerful than the characters who can only look on in horror at their fates unwinding. Tragedy, and related art forms that draw upon its dramatic structures, are connected to something unconscious that, for Figes and the intertexts upon which she is drawing, foregoes the rational in favour of emotional resonance.

For Figes, this investigation into the irrational core of tragedy is not an end in itself; it is part of a critical feminist engagement with patriarchal society. In the rational age, “thunder ceases to be a divine portent and becomes mere electricity”, she writes, yet “without taboos there can be no tragedy”, and tragedy is an essential ritual for social evolution; “it is for this reason that there is only one truly tragic subject in Western literature after the seventeenth century, and that is woman” (*Tragedy and Social Evolution*, 138). The symbol of “woman” within patriarchal society is a figure formed not by “what her mother desired for herself, but what her father and all men find desirable in a woman. Not what she is, but should be” (*Patriarchal Attitudes*, 17). It is here where Figes’ credentials as a feminist writer, called into question by her own assertion that she “is more concerned with women’s emotions” are united in her experimental desire for a “different grid”. This project is vocalised in *Tragedy and Social Evolution* as she describes that,

“there is still a strong prejudice against women in a more controlling position, and particularly against female dramatists, because any woman writer who is worth anything would present an image of women, and perhaps more devastatingly, an image of men, which does not fit in with the male consensus on what men and women are really like” (99).

In redressing this imbalance through the novel form, Figes is engaging in a reconfiguration of emotional structures that have formed society based on the male consensus throughout western history. As an experimental practice, this intention positions these novels as blueprints for a potential future literature. As she writes in *Beyond the Words*; “the artist provides messages about the nature of reality which, if he is successful, become internalised by one or more generation and become accepted as reality itself” (114). Her search for “new models of reality” is a recalibration drawn from a feminine perspective, yet with a revolutionary mandate to alter all consciousness.

Such a mandate is most fully appreciable in novels like *B*, a work where the plot’s focus is so masculine-oriented it could almost belong to a Kingsley Amis novel. A commercially successful writer visits the house of his recently deceased, commercially unsuccessful and yet stylistically brilliant friend, B, and struggles with his own legacy in the face of superior masculine competition. The writer’s voice is that of the unreconstructed, bitter misogynist: “Women are supposed to love love above everything else, the sentimental little dears, but don’t you believe it. Wherever a capitalistic consumer society flourishes on the torn guts of humanity, *cherchez la femme*. It’s because they’re not creative, all they can do is latch on to some poor devil of a man” (35). Within the bluster and the clichéd gripes, however, Figes also skilfully presents the writer’s incomprehension, his alienation from his wife as a fully-formed human being. At one moment he describes her as “revolving like a helpless satellite”, the next he betrays himself as he “attempts to imagine what [her] life could be” (13) beyond her relationship

with him, drawing a blank. As a “wife”, she exists rather as an object than a person. As an object, she exists as a sexual commodity to the extent that, in a discussion with his dead competitor B on the subject of women, she enters the dreamlike sequence and has sex with B in front of him. It is only at this point, when he is losing his sole proprietary right to the possessed object that “the memory of Martha’s body” - addressing his wife by name - intrudes upon his emotions, “[a memory] that I have not allowed to intrude for a long time. I thought I had buried it with distaste years ago” (39). In delving into the misogynistic valuation of women only in relation to relationships between men, Figes demonstrates how patriarchal structures inhibit and deform the masculine imagination as well as the feminine. The hollow and affectless existence that the male protagonist is shown struggling with throughout the novel appears almost as the inverse of that evoked in *Equinox* – Figes first novel which deals with a year in the life of a housewife. From Figes’ perspective, concerned with the deep structures shaping society through history, the sexist is as much a subject of patriarchy as the housewife. It is in the creation of “new models of reality” through formal innovation which foregrounds such contradictions of the patriarchal hierarchy and inspires revolutionary change.

3.3: The War and Women’s Experience

Once we have understood how Figes’ feminine poetics allow her to engage with her narratives from a historical perspective, grounded in anthropology and a tragic tradition, in order to imbue them with a particular feminist discourse, we can finally return to the question of the Second World War and how the memory of that conflict impacts upon the content of her novels. Writing in the introduction to her edited collection of *Women’s Letters in Wartime*, she describes how “war is not experienced in isolation. Usually it goes on for months or years, and gets inextricably bound up with our ordinary lives, one way or another. If, like me, you were a child during the second world war, which went on for six years, then it was ordinary life” (13). A conception of “war” as frontline combat is, from Figes’ perspective, a hugely reductive notion; her entire existence during the “war years” is as much defined by that event as a soldier’s. Her memoir *Little Eden* involves very little in terms of combat – occasional dogfights above her school with resulting plane crashes – but the location of her childhood in a new country, then evacuated from the city, as well as the poor clothes and food resulting from shortages and rationing, all tie her childhood directly to “the War”, even if this event is defined as something happening elsewhere.

The young Figes is placed in the alienating position of being defined by something whilst essentially being kept away from it; its recognised reality being elsewhere. A central aspect of this alienation is doubled for Figes because of her German origins. “I made a point of calling myself Jewish, partly because I felt that Hitler had made me one, but also to avoid being labelled German”, she writes in *Journey to Nowhere*, “the history of the Third Reich meant that I was absolved from wearing the badge of shame” (82). Although, being from a secular Jewish family, a concrete idea of what the label meant eluded her, according to *Little Eden*, rather it was a distancing device that allowed her to fit in with the other children who “strutted and goose-marched round the playground, making sputtering guttural noises which were supposed to sound like German” (54), her first language. The aspect of words and naming being used both to trace and to sever someone from their origins carries many potent implications within a totemistic conception of the world, yet it is also

a potent dramatic technique. *Konek Landing*, for example, sees its protagonist, Stefan Konek, placed into the hands of strangers for protection, and as a means of disguising his origins, they rename him Pavel Zuck, “and if anybody asks you, you will pretend you have never even heard of Stefan Konek” (22). Equally, names become meaningless for the protagonist of *Winter Journey* or “B”, the subject of the eponymous novel. The alienation stems from the new context in which the former label demarcating the individual’s identity suddenly becomes unspeakable - as if the totem has become taboo – and as a result, much of that which had previously been associated with identity is made dubious by association. While being shaped by the war, Figes was evacuated away from it, and despite having lived until the age of seven in Germany, she was Jewish and thus not *really* German. By being defined against things, her experiences somehow take on an illegitimate quality.

Another illegitimacy is attached to the Jewish evacuee on account of her youth. The supposedly authentic experience of war, conceptualised through conflict and sacrifice, is considered imaginatively beyond the child’s fathoming. Like most evacuees, Figes was encouraged to remain innocent of the realities of war. Perhaps inevitably, however, this led to resentment on the part of her mother who, as she writes in *Little Eden*, rebuked her for not taking things seriously enough. “I told myself it was unfair, how was I to know”, she writes, “and at the same time I felt it was all my fault, her unhappiness, my unreasonableness, even the death of those I loved. From now on there was no escape from the burden of guilt” (130). The echoes of Figes’ description of women as the last unknowable subject for tragedy recur here, along with the theoretical framework of tragedy as a means of socially integrating the inexplicable. Individual subjectivity is emotionally defined by an alienation from older generations and the weight of the past. It’s a mode that recurs in Figes’ characterisation of intergenerational relationships, for example, the young girl in *Days* considers her mother and is, as a result, “baffled, confused, knowing that what she does not know cannot be told. It is too much for the mind to grasp” (32). In a larger sense alienation also defines her characters’ relationship to the past, such as the protagonist in *B* who is driven to write “not only by a wish to recapture the past, a sense of loss..., but by a wish to confirm isolation in my physical surroundings. My wounds are the only way I now have of knowing I continue to exist” (107). There remains an unbridgeable gap between generations which finds its ultimate rift in the shared trauma of conflict.

Feminist criticism made a number of reassessments of the war and its aftermath as it developed through the Sixties. Betty Friedan’s *The Feminist Mystique*, published in 1962 and inspiring subsequent American women’s movements concentrated upon “the problem that has no name” shared by many women who appeared to be living the American dream; married with children and a stable home. Voicing dissatisfaction within such a context, she argued, was tantamount to betraying the national “pent-up hunger for marriage, home and children... felt simultaneously by several different generations... which, in the prosperity of post-war America, everyone could suddenly satisfy” (147). Ann Oakley, studying the British equivalent of this phenomenon in 1974’s *Housewife*, adds to this emotional war-debt the new concentration upon child-rearing which “makes ‘successful’ performance of the maternal role crucial”, in spite of the fact that British “children are given an extraordinary amount of attention when judged by the standards of

other societies” (67). The war had placed adult women in a position in which they were socially considered to be both indebted to their husbands and owing to their children; a situation engendering resentment on the part of all involved.

Drawing a dividing line between “wartime” and “post-war” generations, however, is perhaps too totalising a gesture here. The tensions that the generational disparities of experience engender can be seen in a more distinct light than simply “experienced or not”. Figes is clear to make this case when she writes the introduction to her edited collection of *Women’s Letters in Wartime 1450-1945* – itself an exercise in spanning generations – that whilst “war has always been seen as a male activity” and “feminists often try to distance their own gender from the whole awful business,” for all the women who historically tried to stop the fighting, “other women were handing out white feathers” (11). The burden of guilt regarding war is not one, for Figes, that can be placed entirely upon men. Yet, neither could its turbulence and violence be considered a purely masculine burden to bear either. A moment of reverie in *Winter Journey* draws the protagonist back into war memories – “Stalingrad, that was a cold place, the abdication, coronation, D-day, VE-day, any day” (24) – but soon moves past the historically significant events and into a montage of violence as experienced by women. The images of “that girl murdered in the signal-box”, “Sally Simpson coming to work eight months gone”, “bloodstained knitting needles that wouldn’t shift it” (24), disapproving parental figures and social pariah status, all collect into a far more wartorn image than the list of recognised “war” events could conjure. Oppressed by both wartime conditions and a patriarchy reinforced by wartime legitimacy, the forgotten suffering of women during wartime perhaps adds to the gap between generations, especially in terms of the perceived role of women. By utilising the novel form, Figes can address the generational divide whilst engaging with the historical deep structures which oppress both mothers and daughters. The experimental process of “making new connections” allows her to present the lived experience of such ideological contradictions in a manner stylistically unavailable to the writers of political polemics.

The contextual differences between the feminisms of the wartime generation and Figes’ “post-war” generation are thus a clear influence on their differing objectives and focuses. Wartime, for example, brought with it conscription “which legally compelled women to work [and] was introduced in Britain for the first time in December 1941” (Hartley, 71). In her study of British women’s fiction during the Second World War, Jenny Hartley draws out many of the important consequences that the massive increase in women’s labour power had to national output and national consciousness. The nature of women’s labour as a vital social force, and thus women as equal members of the public as well as the private sphere was directly implied by the compulsory nature of this work as “its meaning came to lie more clearly outside itself in its value to the nation” (72). This new consciousness of labour power and the social and economic interests that surround it become, for Hartley, central to women’s culture at this time; “work is the major topic of interest for most women writing about their war experiences, and the publication of so many of those accounts at the time suggests a widespread interest” (75). The new social and economic position of women during wartime led to a huge interest in the experiences of others in work. United by a sense of national purpose, earlier conceptions of women’s labour as the recourse of the working class were challenged and along with them the notion of women’s “traditional” role, albeit under a rubric of “duty” and a qualifying state of exception.

In addressing such a narrative of women’s collective wartime experience, however, Eva

Figes makes a point in *Little Eden* of upsetting the notion that labour was an entirely new practice for all women in society. She describes how discussions concerning the conscription of women for mandatory labour led to the conclusion in parliament that “if we had indeed come to such a pass the women should at least get a reasonable wage” (107). The proposal to pay “a shilling an hour”, however, “was defeated after it had been pointed out that women land workers were being employed for a mere 8d. an hour”; something that presented a “new and somewhat embarrassing insight into the lives of working women” (107) for the Members of Parliament expected to make such decisions. For some, this “embarrassing insight” was even cause for patriarchal panic. Realising that an amendment to the Education Act of 1944 which included equal pay for women teachers had been passed 117 votes to 116, Winston Churchill abandoned the war room to enact a last minute veto. “Why the P.M. was prepared to interrupt his preparations for D-day and, in the midst of London’s heaviest bombing of the war, trouble to prevent teachers receiving equal pay,” in the words of Pat Thane, “suggests the degree of feeling on both sides of the issue” (184). Any new conception of “women” as a historical subject that came out of conscription, a legitimate political category with its own shared interests and a will to fight for them would have the worrying quality of applying across economic classes.

That the Equal Pay Act was not instituted until 1970 perhaps demonstrates the dramatic social reaction which followed the end of the war and end of the state of exception. Not only were the forces of reaction trenchant in their demands for a “return to the home” but, according to Jane Lewis, wartime feminist movements were equally complicit in this drive to promote motherhood under the lingering wartime rubric of “national duty”. “On the whole”, she writes in *Women in Britain Since 1945*, “post-war feminists accepted that women’s most vital task was that of motherhood” (24). Symptomatic of this feeling was “a highly influential book, *Women’s Two Roles*, conceptualised during the 1940s but not published until 1956” which argued that “during the child-rearing years women should be with their children” (24). The motives for this shift away from economic equality are theorised by Lewis as a focus upon “social dislocation as the primary cause of [family] failure” coinciding with a reduction in concerns over “the economic responsibility of the father” (19). Considering statistics in the *Economic History of Britain since 1700* place unemployment as a percentage of the labour force at 1.8% in 1946, falling steadily to 1% by 1951 it could certainly be argued that the case for “redomestication” of women emerged from convivial economic conditions.[18] The same ideological imperatives driving the creation of the welfare state – the “post-war consensus” – appear, for Lewis, to include the patriarchal drive towards domestic “stability” as part of the masculine bias emergent in readings of “The War”.

In terms of intergenerational relationships, this emphasis on increasing women’s security as mothers reinforces the case of “legitimate” and “illegitimate” experiences of war and the attendant feelings of guilt and responsibility. The unspoken taboos reinforcing social hierarchies draw their power from the mother figure’s sacrifice as both passive victims of war and active campaigners for better quality of life for their children. This subtext is occasionally vocalised in Figes’ novels, although its mouthpiece is always a member of the older generation – the younger must suffer the patriarchal claims to obedience in silence. In *Winter Journey* the claims are entirely feminised, the male protagonist being “too soft” on his career-minded daughter as, according to his wife, “you didn’t ever mind what I had to go through, did you, all

those years in the war” (75). Whereas the father can allow for his daughter to attend art school to study fashion design, he seeing her as “not stupid given encouragement”, the idea of a career appears to the mother figure as “just a lot of fancy ideas she’ll grow out of... then she’ll get married and that’ll be the end of that” (75). By emphasising the matriarchal figure as the constrictive force, Figes demonstrates how the emotional structure of patriarchal society relies upon constructions of obligation as opposed to outright coercion. In the historical context of recent wartime experiences, the family unit is valued as an achievement and, as such, the sacrifices that “paid” for its construction can be used to demand its continuity.

A large part of these validating patriarchal myths surrounding the war exist thanks to the successful recuperation of war memories into a hegemonic narrative after the fact. In her study, *Millions Like Us*, Jenny Hartley identifies an almost immediate move away from the wartime tropes in bestsellers after the war’s end. At the head of this about-face from “the noble goals of the People’s War”, was Nancy Mitford’s *The Pursuit of Love* which, according to Hartley, “gave unquestioned and unabashed licence to the enjoyment of light-hearted pleasure, well-heeled romance and snobbery” (198). The fictional escape from the aftermath of war and its attendant values occurs equally in film, as Roger Manvell’s *Films and the Second World War* attests: “British feature films on the whole left war alone until sufficient time had elapsed to make the subject acceptable again in the light of reflection” (236). The cultural industry’s move away from war appears like an act of purging the public imagination for so long embedded in an environment of wartime uncertainties. The return of decadence acts as an ideological celebration of victory in the face of the actual austerity experienced by the majority of the nation, but equally it abandons the political and social questions that war raises by creating a new attitude of social permissiveness to “irresponsibility”. It is this attitude which, in the decade following, can be seen to establish a set pattern of war’s representation. Writing in 1964, Albert Hunt describes “irresponsibility” as the central mode by which the war is returned to; the responsibility of the individual to society, art to truth, and a film’s responsibility to express its message via suitable content are, for Hunt, abandoned. In the paperback trade too, a wave of unprecedentedly violent conflict emerged both in terms of war but also, in a genre popularised during the war itself, in “hard-boiled” detective stories. Steve Holland recounts an interview in which one editor later expressed regret for being involved in such publications as “imagination on the part of the authors often extended to violence during the sex act... such stories, while unpleasant, might have no influence upon balanced readers, but with scores of these stories going out yearly, it seemed to me to amount to a wave of propaganda” (108). In 1971’s *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millet positions these texts – as well as the works of Mailer, Lawrence and Miller – as part of “the masculine tradition of war and virility” (362). The roaring post-war trade in actual pornography (of which Maurice Girodias, and by extension Burroughs and Trocchi, were beneficiaries) would seem to justify such a theory. Outside of adult literature, war stories were “given considerable prominence” in children’s publications, according to Raymond William’s 1962 study *Communications*. In such stories the combatants, “usually British and Nazis” (41), reduce the war to a cartoon conflict between good and evil. Those depicting the war are stripped of any responsibility to the politics of the conflict and the morality of mortal combat. This position is not only amoral, however, but its implicit asocial message is that only “heroes” were involved in war, so others’ experiences are

illegitimate. Women and children's role is limited at most to sacrifice, that is, when their agency is even considered; it being secondary to their archetypal role as the victims in need of rescue or protection from the warrior hero – the dark side of which was visible in the pulp market. The realignment of war as entertainment normalises a certain masculine domination which is only reinforced by a two dimensional sense of morality.

As a result of war being seen as the domain of "heroes", the lingering scars that the war inflicted upon society become alienated from the hegemonic narrative and exist in a haunted state. These uncomfortable realities are traced in many of the settings in Figes' novels. In *Winter Journey* they take on what could even be considered a form of pathetic fallacy. The final journey of a poverty-stricken old man creates a unity of meaning between the present and the past in the novel, connecting the industrial slum area of the present with the war-torn landscape of the past not only in terms of physicality. The "towers and motorways and old crusts of concrete edged with grass and muck" (12) that form his town leave "dust harboured in wrinkles" from days when "the station sign said C . . . Y to fool the enemy" (11) – the old man still hears the train although to do so is physically impossible, "not without my aid on" (11). The "plans to build a flyover here which would mean knocking down number twenty-four" (34) lead him to reflect upon the church demolished ten years earlier where now there is green space "chopped into two triangles with a road running through it and old newspapers blowing across it" (35). The dark side of post-war prosperity and planning, what Rees and Lambert describe as a tendency "to reinforce inequalities and disparities which were longstanding features of the British social structure" (79), sees the resultant planned demolition of community structures take place simultaneous to bomb damage in the winding monologue that comprises the form of *Winter Journey*. The return to the war as a time of trauma and uncertainty, often meaningless suffering, undermines the ideological structures that make the war a tragic narrative, an act of fatalistic sacrifice. The narrator's dislocation, beyond society's "grid", has no dissenting or political voice but rather wanders in memory, an alien reality whose existence seems throughout the text to be almost ghostly, sharing none of the reference points of those around it. The protagonist's own existence and memory is a living contradiction of the triumphalist post-war narrative.

Beneath this tragic mode there also exists the other major influence on Figes' writing identified in her memoirs; the lingering effect of the holocaust upon her identity. In terms of "holocaust writing" - dealing explicitly with the subject and/or written by those whose first-hand experience of camps labels them "survivors" - Figes can only be considered a peripheral figure. In fact, her most confident attempt to construct the holocaust is notably made in *Journey to Nowhere* as an exercise in disputing the propaganda of Israeli apartheid; an argument based on her variform Jewish experience and identity that denies the existence of a single Jewish state in terms of both nationhood and as a way of being. The experiences of a young girl, evacuated in 1939, whose father escaped the camps, is set out in *Little Eden*, but raises the same questions about legitimacy that are seen in the "post-war" generation. Which experience is "first-hand" enough to constitute a "survivor"? Legitimacy of victimhood appears on a sliding scale of suffering that, for those on the comparably-less-bad end of the spectrum implies a huge weight of guilt. Harry Corgas, in writing of how the holocaust is dealt with in fiction, suggests that certain similar difficulties are often addressed "with understatement, to

write in what some critics have identified as a literature of silence” (534). Figes’ subtle tone, ambiguous hints and melancholic prose-poetry all lend themselves to this description. The definite presence of a Jewish identity, or more rightly a survivor’s identity, with its attendant compulsive guilt and ambiguous relationship to the beauty of life presents another element of Figes’ unique style.

Zoe Waxman’s book *Writing the Holocaust* traces the development of “holocaust writing” from its presence in the camps through to modern contributions and revisions. Arguing that the “survivor’s individual experiences have become part of a collective memory” (89), she nevertheless makes clear that this memory develops over time. The initial post-war feeling shared by many was “a moral duty to testify, but also the need somehow to account for their survival” (88). It is a sensation born of a need to clarify the experiences suffered, yet also one that carries a burden of guilt. This attitude is interestingly reflected in Figes’ first novel, *Equinox*, in a distinctly gender-politicised manner. The novel’s perspective is that of the housewife entangled in the bonds of domesticity and, as such, the husband character holds a central role that could be described as antagonist. However, for all the personal details of the female writer character that may imply autobiographical connections, it is the character of the husband that is given the Jewish identity. The effect of this is to present a barrier of male subjectivity that is at once confrontational – “You really despise me for being a Jew, don’t you, deep down” (36), he says after an unsuccessful dinner party – and simultaneously a point of contemplation: “she thought about Martin... his love hate for the English way of life which had allowed him to grow up in security but condemned his parents to death because their economic self-sufficiency could not be guaranteed” (86). The testimony of the survivor is projected on to the oppressive role of domineering husband; the need to account for survival is therefore positioned as part of a privileged male subjectivity that, by its nature, is unopen to question by the female in a patriarchal society. The power to justify history, to place experience into a “collective memory” narrative, remains the prerogative of masculinity. In a narrative sense, this places the protagonist of *Equinox* in a bind of double-illegitimacy wherein her personal experience is considered a dereliction of her duties to the male victim of war and the Jewish victim of the holocaust. Again the patriarchal bias of social narrative entraps women with taboo forces.

Yet to assume the “collective memory” has always been so is to misunderstand the nature of the holocaust as an historical event. In terms of its construction through the gradual accumulation of historical documents, the period in which Figes writes these early novels is especially important. Waxman describes the “watershed for acknowledging the suffering of... holocaust survivors” (113) as occurring in the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961. The very word “holocaust” as a means of describing Nazi atrocities, one that specifically emphasises “the murder of European Jewry during World War Two” (88) as a distinct element of the mass destruction in Europe at that time, did not become popularised in English “until sometime between 1957 and 1959” (88) according to Waxman. On the back of this interest and the Eichmann trial, Raul Hilberg published *The Destruction of the European Jews* in 1961 which, at the time, “had to be sponsored by the Frank and Janina Petschek Foundation” (as is emphasised by Figes in *Journey to Nowhere*, who writes, “I know, because I was one of the original purchasers” (141)). Indeed, for Figes, this fact is symptomatic of how “in 1945 the massacre of six million Jews was not considered the most important aspect of the war” (141). The aspects of *Konek Landing* that feature the Jewish refugee hiding in

cupboards “months on end years maybe” (16) or starving as work for him is “not legal, and [he is] lacking the necessary contacts” (95) all carry deep resonances for the reader familiar with holocaust iconography – yet it would be questionable to assume this specific level of awareness in the readership of its 1969 publication.

In treating Figes as a political writer making use of a technique of historical revisionism we can be seen to be placing her within a distinct contemporaneous trajectory. For Nelly Sachs, winner of the 1966 Nobel Prize for Literature, the Sixties presented a moment that she looked back to in 1993 as a kind of starting point: “subjects that were, before the 1960s, déclassé – women’s, blacks’, and Hispanics’ rights, Third World cultures, the Holocaust – now contend for overdue consideration” (Klein, xv). The coming to prominence of identity politics created a moment wherein submerged narratives could aspire to enter the hegemonic mainstream. The strength of this idea is such that when Waxman writes of the first post-war Holocaust memoirs in the forties she writes against “the idea of an all-pervasive post-war silence” (100) that she still sees as dominant in Holocaust studies in 2006, in spite of the large number of Yiddish-language memoirs published. The notion of a continent going through “difficult times of mourning and reconstruction, [not wanting to] return in memory to the painful years” (375) as Primo Levi describes it, comes to validate the return to the Holocaust in the Sixties. In terms of counter-narratives, Figes is placed as much in a “holocaust writing” setting as a feminist setting when she engages with these subjects; the emphasis being placed largely as part of a historical return, and a generational claim to a new politics.

Again we can return to Figes’ conception of society as drawn through the anthropological and narratological studies, *Tragedy and Social Evolution* and *Patriarchal Attitudes*. For Figes, “the finger of blame may be pointed with rationality, but if no obvious scapegoat or explanation can be found... societies are quick enough to find an irrational scapegoat... Jews, blacks or communists” (*Tragedy and Social Evolution*, 12). Enlightenment notions of a civilised society moving beyond superstition through reason fall apart in Figes’ writings in the moment of their expression; revealed as, more often than not, superficial apologies for oppressive systems of coercion. Whether she is writing the old, the sick, the Jew or the woman, her characters emit a dual being as both individual and historically constituted subject. As a tragic form, this can lead her novels into strange poetries of despair such as the end of *Konek Landing* which, in pursuing the totality of “a different grid”, steps out of recognisable reality and into a symbolic dreamscape, an omniscience of thoughts. The holocaust survivor aspect of the Konek character, only rarely alluded to in the novel, is universalised. Born from the dawn of life at the start of the narrative, in the end he is carried away and potentially sacrificed in a tribal ritual, himself labelled *misra* – “the word a talisman” (153) constantly repeated – becoming “a willing sacrifice” (158) to be offered to unknown gods. The image is one that emphasises the scapegoat nature of his character directly, although in an unexpected way it validates it. The power of the tragic figure is fundamentally rooted in the unavoidable nature of their fate. It is a conclusion that points to collective responsibility and collective guilt; a writing of victimhood within which the central concern is not what happens to the victim, but rather what such a ritual says about the society that perpetrates it. In many ways it is this quintessentially ambiguous, animistic, and haunted vision which represents the capacity for Figes’ writing to be simultaneously epiphanous in its aesthetics, politically

potent, and experimentally innovative at the same moment.

3.4: Journalism and Politics

As has been mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Eva Figes could not survive as a single mother purely upon the income from her literature and occasional Arts Council grants. One of the forms that her other work took was journalistic writing: mostly reviews and commissioned editorial pieces. As commercial writing, these pieces can be used as a means of plotting Figes' more personal and creative literary trajectory against an industry "mainstream". Her essays mark the points at which professional editors felt her writing would be in demand by their publications' audience. Having seen how Figes' work resonates between the two aspects of everyday ritual and deep social structure, we can now use her journalistic output to connect her writing to the third aspect of the historical moment. Most specifically, between the years of 1967 and 1973, Figes' journalistic writing simultaneously reflects her philosophical concerns and the trajectory of national current events already outlined in the introduction.

Prior to 1968, the majority of Figes' writing to appear in periodicals came in the form of reviews - a practice that she continues throughout, contributing to high-brow culture magazine *The Listener* on a fairly regular basis. One notable review in *The Guardian* at the end of 1967 demonstrates the state of British culture's attitudes to feminism,

There is something faintly comic about militant feminism now, which is unfortunate, considering that the social injustice was real enough. One detects the snigger in David Mitchell's book though it is a serious study of the Pankhursts and he obviously likes and admires them too.

That a historical study of the Pankhursts elicits a condescending humour may be a comment upon the author's style, yet its ideological premises are nevertheless echoed by Figes herself as she defends the fact that "the social injustice was real enough". The past tense framing of social injustice is in keeping with the scientific progressivism of Sixties sentiment; one cannot imagine that an advanced technological society harbours social injustice, which is something surely limited to the less enlightened past. The work of connecting the political present to women's long historical oppression remains in its latency.

As the consumerism of mid-Sixties Swinging London moves into the counter-cultural politics of 1968, however, Figes' engagement with contemporaneous injustice begins to receive a platform in the form of an increased number of editorial pieces. One of these, published in *The Daily Telegraph Magazine* under the title "Opinion", takes the bold stance of reassessing the cold war from a woman's perspective, suggesting that "when one looks at the status of women in Russia today it makes one wonder whether total revolution is not the only way to bring about real changes for the female sex". A similar stance is taken on "The Generational War" in *The Guardian*, where Figes argues that the contemporary political issue of youth rebellion falls along the same fault-lines as the "conflict... between the sexes"; "we try to be fair in a situation that is basically unfair and unequal". The central message underlying her writing is similarly evoked in her defence

of the Dagenham Ford plant strike for equal pay; women who were acting towards a radical improvement in their own conditions “would be doing a favour not only to themselves, but to the whole country” (“The Half-Hearted Revolution”). Figes’ 1968 pieces draw together a whole range of social concerns as a means of highlighting women’s position within society. Prior to the discourse made available in the “Second Wave” of 1970, such a project is vocalised in the language of post-war consensus. Women’s interests are promoted as part of a democratic socialist project of improvement for all through social welfare structures.

Returning to Figes’ novelistic output it can be seen how these patterns of political thinking tie in to her larger projects of formal innovation. *Equinox*, her first novel published in 1966, uses the diary form as means of connecting the daily struggles of a housewife with the deep anthropological structures that a calendar and its seasonal rhythms imply. The feminist contestation of this state of affairs can only be expressed through the evocation of the protagonist’s existence. Figes’ experimental approach could be seen as an attempt to formally reflect Betty Friedan’s notion of “The Problem that Has No Name”. In Figes’ next two novels, the problem of women’s dissatisfaction in the midst of prosperity is then sublimated into the wider issues of the post-war era. 1967’s *Winter Journey* is written from the perspective of a male war veteran dying in poverty and 1969’s *Konek Landing* develops similar themes in depicting the desolation of post-war Europe and the spectre of the holocaust. As has been seen, Figes uses these narratives to raise questions about the ideological framing of trauma in collective memory. When these questions are considered alongside her journalistic work in which she presented women’s perspectives on contemporary issues, one can almost consider *Patriarchal Attitudes* as a fusion of the two approaches. Published in 1970, the work amalgamates an eye for contemporary politics, an anthropological appreciation for deep structures of history and perceptual clarity in the presentation of “woman” as a historical subject.

The success of *Patriarchal Attitudes* demonstrably benefits Figes’ career in essay writing, the number of specially commissioned pieces she is offered appears to double in the first years of the 1970s. Pieces were written for *The Guardian*, *The Observer Magazine*, *Vogue*, *Man and Woman*, *Nova*, *Forum*, *The Evening Standard*, *Good Housekeeping* and *The Listener*. The correspondences which accompany the commissions simultaneously demonstrate how alien feminist ideas appeared in contrast with the usual topics of women’s magazine publishing as well as indicating the popularity of women’s movements by the fact that “traditional” journals were suddenly rushing to publish feminist pieces. Faye Ainscow of *Forum* wrote to Figes on 1st January 1971 expressing her appreciation of *Patriarchal Attitudes* and asking for a contribution to their “series on marriage in the seventies”. Jill Wilkins, editor of the *Health and Beauty Encyclopaedia*, requested an article about “The Plain Sister” which she then asked to have corrected on 18th May 1970, complaining that “it seems to be more concerned with the dilemmas of any young girl exposed to beauty-care propaganda. This is not really relevant”. A 1971 article for *Good Housekeeping*, “What are Women Fighting For?”, was run with only one correction: the rewriting of the “provocative” title “The Sexist Society”.

The explosion of the women’s movement in the first years of the 1970s was widely acknowledged outside of traditionally women-orientated publications. On 30th June 1970,

J.E. Davis wrote to Eva Figes requesting a “special report” on “women in society” for the *Britannica Book of the Year*, stating that, “Obviously, the proliferation of new feminist movements during the last year or two, particularly in the United States but also in Europe, has had a bearing on our selection of this topic”. The final piece, which Figes wrote “on the assumption that the readership would probably be worldwide” (28th July 1970), reads like a highly compact version of *Patriarchal Attitudes* in its simultaneously contemporary and deeply historical perspective. After introducing the topic of discrimination against women through its “most serious” modern manifestation, the pay gap, Figes goes on to present her fullest explication of the war’s impact on women’s situation both during the conflict and in her contemporary moment;

The generation of educated women who grew up at the end of the Second World War were restrained from militancy, not only because they formed a much smaller minority, but because at the time it was fashionable to emphasise the importance of continuous personal contact between a mother and her young children. A reaction to wartime conditions also helped to enhance the attractions of family life. But attitudes to family bonds have changed considerably since then, and the people most responsible for changing them are the young adults who were brought up as Spock babies by that generation. So the ranks of angry young women are swelled by the middle-aged, now redundant mothers who have come to feel that too large a personal sacrifice was demanded of them for those short years of active motherhood, and that they have been cheated of any hope of realising other ambitions in their middle age (10).

In addressing both mothers and daughters, Figes is not only bridging the much talked-about “generation gap” popularised in late Sixties discourse but also identifying the breadth of impact which the flourishing women’s movement was having. The 1978 introduction to *Patriarchal Attitudes* also makes a point of this unity of purpose, describing how “women’s workshops sprang up all over the country; almost every college had its feminist group, and women’s associations of long standing and of all kinds suddenly joined in the growing chorus” (8). The accusation of Nigel Fountain in *Underground*, that – along with Germaine Greer – Figes “remained resolutely detached from the upsurge” (107), finds its fatal flaw in this respect. Where Fountain focuses upon the new feminist periodicals emerging from the counter-culture like *Shrew*, *Red Rag* and *Spare Rib*, he fails to recognise the less dramatic yet equally important shifts occurring in mainstream women’s journals. In terms of this phenomenon, Eva Figes is at the crest of the wave.

As with other writers in this study, there is a shift in Figes’ output around the end of 1972 and the beginning of 1973 which coincides with the break in national political opinion away from the post-war consensus. Although Figes maintains a deep interest in feminism and continues to write pieces furthering the cause of the women’s movement, her work writing for *New Humanist* marks a return to current affairs commentary but now with an increasing irony, cynicism and detachment. A piece on “The Troubles with State Monopoly” in December 1972 contains a protracted attack upon the national gas supplier after her conversion to gas was “almost enough to convert me to private enterprise into the bargain... After all, who are ‘the people’ if not consumers?”. This was followed by a piece in February 1973 entitled “Accustomed as I am to Public Speaking” announcing her desire to retire from writing political editorials to return to literary subjects, suggesting that “A writers’ true commitment is through his craft, in the realm of ideas... There are plenty

of propagandists anyhow: what we need to be is seekers after truth". It is some point around 1973 (the British Library manuscript copy only tells the year) that Figes then writes her essay "The New Humanism" in a half-sarcastic, half-nostalgic tribute to when "the first post-war election heralded the dawn of a new age", almost unimaginable from the piece's historical perspective at "the tail-end of the Industrial Miracle". A new image of the war's legacy is presented,

The Welfare State would protect everyone from the cradle to the grave. Though sweets were still rationed our senior citizens would soon enjoy free spectacles, pills and teeth. With this false dawn of the age of the Common Man came all sorts of new technological marvels. After the war it was suddenly revealed to a deluded public that it was not Cockney courage and Winston Churchill's cigar which had won the Battle of Britain but a secret device called radar. This modern marvel was to be followed by such peacetime delights as nylon stockings, television, man-made fibres, plastics in every shape and colour, and transistor radios. A plethora of goodies.

Figes' satirical intention in "The New Humanism" seems to oscillate unpredictably; at one moment the article is attacking the superficial concerns of consumers during the boom years, the next it is lamenting the passing of those years as a time of hope and plenty. The final result comes across as bitter and misanthropic – a piece more suitable for *The Spectator* than *New Humanist* – yet in being so written it also communicates frustration. After all, even when describing millennia of ingrained patriarchal hegemony in her polemical writing Figes would retain her restrained writing style. The frustration at the "end of an era" doesn't appear to make its way into Figes' writing the way it does with other British experimental novelists in the Sixties, yet in her journalistic writing it is certainly palpable.

Conclusion

Not only does Eva Figes present us with unique and original experimental novels, her broad range of work – memoir, journalism, political essays and academic studies – offers us insight into a number of practices normally considered distinct. Figes' journalistic output, tied to a particular moment in the history of British feminism, is noticeably informed by her wider academic practice which, in turn, can be seen to both inform and be informed by her creative work. Political and emotional undercurrents which shape the post-war era are everywhere subtly present in networks of influence and confluence; the spectres of history channelled into dynamic currents and reactionary blockages alike. Figes' practice demonstrates how the experimental search for "a different grid" is not simply a matter of niche aesthetic concern, but is tied to the revolutionary cultural moment of the Sixties at all levels.

Chapter 4: “A Committee Plans Unpleasant Experiments”: The Cut-up Culture of Alan Burns

4.1: Critical Understanding of Alan Burns

If we are to consider the British experimental novelists of the Sixties as something approximating a “movement” in a conscious sense, then the character who would perhaps be at the head of such a movement would be Alan Burns. John Calder, in describing the group of writers most closely associated with his avant garde literary press – among them Eva Figs, B.S. Johnson, and Ann Quin – considered Burns to play exactly this role (*Pursuit*, 277). Similarly, Jonathan Coe describes how Burns was “the one British writer of whose intellect, seriousness and literary and political commitment B.S. Johnson remained permanently in awe” (407). A barrister-turned-novelist, Burns’ approach to experimental writing is far more theoretically driven than many of his contemporaries, although it also contains a hard political core which, as with the other writers studied here, inextricably links formal innovation with the desire for social change.

Although a handful of academics have approached Burns’ writing in the past – most notably the contributors to the Alan Burns issue of *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* (No. 17 (2)) – his name is also used by certain academics as a stand-in for all that they dislike about the general idea of “experimental” fiction. Andrzej Gasiorek, in *Post-War British Fiction: Realism and After*, uses Burns as a straw man figure synonymous with the “experimental” writing he sees as “increasingly rarefied versions of the earlier shock tactics... the fag-end of a dying tradition” (19). Making passing reference to Burns’ works as “Dada-inspired collages”, Gasiorek sets him against those who “preferred to fuse technical innovations with strong social concerns” (180). Notably, the novelists that draw Gasiorek’s praise are principally “concerned” with storytelling and sympathy; the making palpable of other’s lives by fitting them into the safe bourgeois novel form. John Orr, in *Tragic Realism and Modern Society*, makes a similar case for the Political Novel as something that “directly confronts the hero with the performed experience of others, who exist in their own right as individual beings” (42); a trend that “experimental” novels move away from in their “evasion of social relationships” (42). For the traditionalist, the “Political Novel” concerns communication between self-sufficient individuals for the perusal of the rational and objective reader. These are the exact presumptions which Alan Burns’ political project is intended to upset. In fact, by failing to recognise Burns as a political writer critics have failed to grasp not only the relevance of his work but also the valuable contribution to twentieth century British writing that the Sixties experimental novel represents overall.

When writing of Alan Burns in the *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Charles Sugnet describes his creative writing lessons at the University of Minnesota where Burns taught “the craft of the old conventions so effectively that some of [the other students] were surprised to discover he is an ‘experimental novelist’ (to use the standard marginalising term of that period)” (194). This revelation brought with it a simultaneous awareness of the politics embedded in his experimental style: “always... uncompromisingly political and uncompromisingly avant-garde at the same time: the work demonstrates at the sentence level Burns’ conviction that these two positions are inseparable” (193). Indeed, for Burns the act of writing differently is inherently linked to the act of thinking differently

and so the radical construction of text becomes a political act in itself. “Early in writing I was naïve enough to think I could change the world, a little,” Burns says in a 1981 interview for *The Imagination on Trial*, “or even quite a lot” (167). These are certainly not the words of someone solipsistically seeing out the “fag-end of a dying tradition”, but rather suggest a writer grasping their historical moment with the Marxist dictum that writing about the world should not be an end in itself, but a means to changing it.

However, for the same reasons that inspired Burns to write, we must first look to certain aspects of Burns’ context before we assess his works as individual pieces. As a manipulator of physical text, Burns’ style of practice is one of unique importance to the literary radicals of his moment. The central figurehead in popularising this practice was William S. Burroughs whose work with Brion Gysin on “cut-ups” and “fold-ins” so captured the cultural imagination that when Burns adopts similar techniques in 1965’s *Europe After the Rain* he struggles under the accusation of plagiarism - in spite of not reading Burroughs himself until a number of years later (Madden: 1997, 125). With variations on the method appearing not only in literature but art, music, film, and even political pamphleteering and underground journalism such as *Oz*, there was similarly a glut of contemporary (non-academic) theorising that arose to explain the relevance of the method. It is this theorising of the “cut-up”, and its interrelations with contemporary theories of social programming arising at the same time in the New Left, that will provide us with a background from which to approach his own contribution to the phenomenon of the experimental novel of the Sixties and the political intention which lay behind his personal idiosyncratic approach.

4.2: Burroughs, Burns and the Physical Manipulation of Text

Introducing *The Imagination on Trial*, a collection of interviews co-edited with Alan Burns and published in 1981 (although the earliest included interviews, those with Eva Figes and BS Johnson, date from 1973), Charles Sugnet talks of the huge influence Burroughs had upon the writers both in the volume and upon the British literary scene in general. He writes about discovering him at Cambridge and feeling that “however out of place Burroughs may seem in such an artificial paradise, he found a place in the rest of Britain” (2). Indeed, for the working class Britain of the decaying industrial North, or the cramped urban sprawl of London, “Burroughs fits right into your native landscape”; his writing is doing what many contemporary British writers are attempting, which is accurately to express the “surreality of urban existence under late capitalism” (2). There is a sense in which Burroughs’ novels represent not only breakthrough texts in themselves but also a licence to construct novels in such a fashion, to express the things no-one in Britain had yet had the courage (or the success) to properly express by themselves. Talking of a similar moment of “discovering Burroughs” in 1965, Ian Breakwell makes the comparison with visual artists who, when they used words, “naturally took fragmentation and non-linear narrative for granted. William Burroughs instantly made sense to me: it was a collage using words instead of visual images” (184). Outside the visual arts – those that Brion Gysin, Burrough’s collaborator, famously said were thirty five years ahead of literature – the response was not so positive: “the literary critics claimed he was unreadable,” Breakwell writes. Like Sugnet, however, Breakwell does identify certain contemporary writers upon whom he considered the Burroughs influence to be felt; amongst them, “J.G. Ballard, Joe Orton, Ann Quin, B.S. Johnson and Alan Burns” (184).

The critical moment of Burroughs' elevation to "influence" status in the British literary scene is said in Ted Morgan's exhaustive biography, *Literary Outlaw*, to come with John Calder's decision in 1962 to book out Edinburgh University's 3000 seat McEwan hall and add a huge literary conference to the proceedings of the already sizeable Edinburgh festival. Burroughs' description of the cut-up technique, reinforced by the furore surrounding the *Naked Lunch* obscenity trial, became one of the central debating topics discussed on the day with writers as disparate as Normal Mailer, Mary McCarthy, Alexander Trocchi and Henry Miller lining up to express their enthusiasm whilst an equally loud voice of disapproval was heard from Malcolm Muggeridge, Stephen Spender, Rayner Heppenstall and Colin MacInnes. As a result, Burroughs' cut-up method was thoroughly described in periodicals such as *The Scotsman*, *The Times* and *Books and Bookmen*; not always with enthusiasm but certainly with an eye for a good story (Morgan, 341). John Calder, whose reputation as a showman was only equalled by his respect for authors' editorial choices, commissioned Burroughs to compile *Dead Fingers Talk* in early 1963. "To avoid the kind of books of selections I find so dreary," Burroughs said in a later interview, "I have arranged [sections from *Naked Lunch*, *The Soft Machine*, and *The Ticket That Exploded*] in the form of another novel with some additional linking material" ("Burroughs after Lunch", 52). This cut-up of two earlier cut-ups and his own novel "received a long hostile review in the *Times Literary Supplement* – it was headlined 'Ugh' – sparking off a fourteen-week correspondence often running up to four pages per issue" (Lotringer, 54), and effectively placing Burroughs and his techniques back at the centre of literary debates yet again.

The sudden rise to prominence and eventual ubiquity of Burroughs within the British literary scene of the Sixties can perhaps be attributed to his work's placement at the heart of many divisive debates and fissures present within British culture at the time. His Beat credentials place him at the heart of a counter-culture struggling against the restraints of tradition – or its British equivalent "the Establishment" – but also internally divided around questions of American cultural hegemony. The cut-up technique upsets traditional conceptions of the author as imaginative creator borrowing, as it does, older works and reappropriating them. Similarly, Burroughs' work appears to chime with the questions of consciousness and control which were central to the various political movements known as the "New Left". A central text, Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*, evokes a proto-Burroughsian feel at a number of points. "Control" occurs, according to Marcuse, when "propositions assume the form of suggestive commands" – dead metaphors like "lifestyle", "entertainment industry", "war games", "friendly-fire", promote positive thinking and dissuade critical thinking – and, as a result, modern society is pacified by "Publicity Agents [who] shape the universe of communication" (85). It is within this tradition that much of Alan Burns' experimental approach can be situated. As will be seen from the following study, however, Burns seldom vocalises his own intentions, often presenting his arguments in a suggestive rather than didactic fashion. As a result, Burroughs' willingness to elaborate at length about his approach may serve as a useful introduction to how physical manipulation of text was being theorised during the Sixties, even if Burns' own approach has a number of notable differences.

Nathan Moore, writing about Burroughs' conception of "Nova Law" and the "logic of control", takes the novelist's recurring term - "control" - to mean "a set of problems concerned with the functioning of language or, more explicitly, with the relations between word and image"

(435). It is this set of language/image connections that Burroughs imagines as the ideological structures dictating human organisation and social coercion. The ties between language structures and power structures are not only acting closely, towards a common interest, but are actively one and the same. In Burroughs' more lucid moments of explanation, such as the introduction to his collaboration with Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind* (the first book-length attempt to explain and demonstrate the cut-up technique as a revolutionary force), he explains "control" in historical terms as an imperialist literary engine of the emergent bourgeoisie:

In composing verbal chains subject to extremely strict rules that provided not only sophisticated entertainment suitable to an evening of leisure but above all the expression of the political and aesthetic formalism of an empire that had invented its very religion, the coauthors of these *linked poems* established the organic and ideological connections on which their privileges were founded (10).

The aesthetic correlation between strict form and metre with content that praises order, honour, bravery, and other military virtues lends these poems an internal, "organic" consistency. Once "linked" together into a network of established literary practice and taste such values hold the monopoly on judgement. A statement against the established order, against their privileges, is then no longer simply "disagreement", but is rather "morally wrong" and "unnatural". There is also within this concept an echo of the linguistic term "control"; for example, the subject control verb that implicates the agency of the doer within the action.^[19] Burroughs is therefore thinking power relations as immanent forces within everyday life; a reformulation of power most often credited to his poststructuralist contemporaries in terms of theory but, for Burroughs, began with his study of Alfred Korzybski's general semantics at university (Morgan, 72).

Against this concept of power as internalised "control", Burroughs poses his cut-up method as the ultimate site of resistance. Cut-ups become "exercises to expand consciousness, to teach me to think in association blocks rather than words" (Burroughs and Gysin, 2). Cutting between images, phrases, textual blocks, creates new network connections just as immanent as "control" but no longer operating within their established associations; dominant values, logics, and ideologies. For Burroughs and Gysin, this is simply making "explicit a psychosensory process that is going on all the time anyway" ; the person reading a newspaper in "the proper Aristotelian manner, one idea and sentence at a time" is also, unconsciously, "reading the columns on either side and is aware of the person sitting next to him. That's a cut-up" (4-5). Certainly later scientific studies of reading, such as those drawn on by Glyn White in *Reading the Graphic Surface*, have proven that "when reading, we are perceiving the whole page, as well as the linear, left to right, continuation of the text. [Although] ordinarily the specific differences between one page of prose and the next go unnoticed" (9). The "making explicit" of the cut-up technique is intended to force a re-evaluation of reading processes within the subject and, in doing so, undermine the power structures imposed upon them by "control" by weakening their monopoly on associations.

It is at this point that the revolutionary aspect of Burroughs' ideas appears, and with it a whole set of political associations which, described in interviews from the late 1960s and 1970s, often position Burroughs' works as part of a distinct movement against existent organisations. In a 1968 interview with Jeff Shiro entitled "Revolt!", he states that "the very fact that we have this communications system [means] it can be decentralised at any point. The first thing for any revolutionary party to do would be to seize the communications. Who owns

communications now, controls the country” (97). Arguably, such statements could be discounted as common to the radical posturing of many popular underground figures of the time. However, by 1974 Burroughs is still making similar statements. An interview with Pierre Dommergues, entitled “Recipes for a Liberation”, focuses on the definite need to advance ideologically if revolution is to be possible: “the Inquisition and the power of the church in the Middle Ages weren’t overturned by direct revolutionary action. Their control disappeared because human consciousness went further” (243). Rather than discarding revolutionary change as futile or embracing a certain fatalistic determinism on the back of this analysis, Burroughs makes imperative the need for artistic commitment to liberation – “you have to shatter the official lines of association” – and amongst the techniques that make this possible, “I offer methods capable of having a subversive effect” (242). Cutting-up becomes a form of creative destruction; a radical action in its own right. It is this vision of communication as domination and the cut-up as praxis which represents one of the foremost literary trends of the counter-cultural British Sixties. Exported from America by Burroughs, the British nevertheless appropriated it for their own experimental purposes.

The reach of cut-up culture is difficult to define, its popularity being such that debts to Burroughs as an inspiration would often go unrecognised. Tom Philips, whose “treated Victorian novel” *A Humument* first appeared in 1970, first mentions “the related influence of William Burroughs and John Cage” (ix) in an added introduction in 2012. Jeff Nuttall, whose underground paper *My Own Mag* featured contributions from Burroughs, made constant use of the cut-up technique. Visual quotation was also a popular technique made use of by the underground press, *Monty Python’s* Terry Gilliam, The Beatles (whose “Sgt. Pepper” album cover, made by pop artist Peter Blake, features Burroughs amongst other cut-and-paste faces), and countless others. Joe Orton, identified by Breakwell as a key British writer influenced by Burroughs, spent the summer of Burroughs’ 1962 rise in prison for “cutting-up”, altering and, from a legal standpoint, vandalising the covers of public library books. Alexander Trocchi, also connected to John Calder through his Better Books’ “environmental exhibitions” of 1965, established his “Project Sigma, the... intergalactic [telephone] switchboard of information, a project for “invisible insurrection” (Fountain, 23) in 1966 having worked with Burroughs in Paris only a few years earlier. In experimental theatre, Charles Marowitz produced a whole series of Shakespearean “cut-ups” - “*A Macbeth, Hamlet, An Othello, The Shrew, Measure for Measure and Variations on the Merchant of Venice*” (Schiele, 15) – all of which drew considerable attention and acclaim. One person who considerably appreciated Marowitz’s work was Alan Burns, who would produce *Palach* with him at the Open Space theatre in 1970.^[20]

Burns’ play, originally titled “Remember Palach”, was – according to a publicity letter from Marion Boyars – intended to “show the indifference of the world at large to [Czech student Jan] Palach’s suicide, and although it is not the obvious sermon, it would fall into the category of unstated propaganda”. Palach, who committed a public act of self-immolation in protest at the end of the Prague Spring in 1969, is presented as a nondescript everyman character, not particularly outspoken or possessed of intense emotions, with the act itself merely implied. The intention is to recreate the suffocating conditions of suburban mediocrity through many “strands of action” (“Remember Palach”, 1) occurring simultaneously. Five forms of “Words” are read out, overcutting each other,

these being both invented (“Medieval disputation explores the mythical and historical aspects”, “Poetic evocation of the martyrdom, spoken as dramatic monologue”), drawn from real statements (“Documents: Jan Palach’s last letter... scientific treatise on self-burning”, “Dialogue... memories of Palach’s suicide as witnessed event and news item”), and invented “Communist Party communiqués”. As these “Words” are read, actors take part in simultaneous smaller scenes with titles like “Lovers”, “Art”, “Knockabout”, “Money”, which pastiche daily life whilst providing metacriticism of the play itself (a “financial analysis of the evening’s performance” (2), for example). Further unpredictable aspects are then added in the form of playbacks of interviews with the audience conducted prior to the show, randomly selected recordings from Calder’s 1962 Edinburgh Writer’s Conference (no doubt featuring Burroughs), and a planned fire alarm (although the note “Read Theatre Fire Regulations”, suggests this may not have made the final performance for legal reasons). The climax of the piece was a totality of noise which is used to simultaneously “evoke the Noise of Prague, when, on 1st anniversary of the Soviet invasion, the population expressed its independence by dominating the streets with a barrage of noise” (3) as well as reflecting the intensity of self-immolation. One can imagine that the low budget audio equipment available to an experimental theatre in 1970 would produce tremendous feedback and distortion during this climax aurally replicating the crunching sound of burning cut through with high-pitched screaming. That this noise is generated through simultaneous voices would implicate society and its discourses in the resulting act itself.

Due to its contingent nature, *Palach* is not particularly evocative in its scripted form and its staging would have rendered any attempt at a faithful recording impossible; the action was designed to surround the audience in a reversed “in-the-round” setting, immersing them in the action. Jinnie Schiele’s *Off-Centre Stages* does contain some of the “Ionesco-like” pre-scripted conversations, however, including those of Dad “[read newspaper]: Paper, paper, paper, paper, paper” and Mum “[washes dishes]: Dishes, dishes, dishes, dishes, dishes” (51), as well as conversations constructed out of advertising slogans. The techniques that bind such a production to the Burroughsian method can be seen in this aspect of redundancy and “found materials”, as well as the element of tape recording.^[21] Importantly though, *Palach* also contains the elements which differentiate Alan Burns’ experimental method from Burroughs’ cut-ups and other Sixties aleatory practices in general. At the heart of this practice is the desire to liberate new, more authentic modes of presentation from the anarchistic fragmentation of the old. In the act of shattering the lines of “control” as defined by Burroughs, Marcuse, et al, Burns is seeking to liberate latent energies which established structures have seemingly curtailed and stratified.

The fullest account that Alan Burns provides of his overall experimental approach is the unfinished work *Accident in Art*, an “Outline” of which is held in the Calder Archive in Indiana. Perhaps fittingly, the thirty-six pages of notes comprising the “Outline” are almost entirely made up of quotations. To grasp Burns’ thinking, one has to intuit the use to which each of these quotations might be put. A quote from Burroughs, for example, is a short comment comparing words to “animals” that “know better where they belong than you do” (10). Rather than the cut-up technique itself, we can see that Burns is drawn to the implication of an authentic order, a “truer” grammar. One of the only sections not

made up of quotations in *Accident in Art* concerns Marlon Brando;

His acting has the poetry of free association, in that state of mind between sleeping and waking, at the same time clear and confused... he moves at the pace of the semi-somnambulist. And, as it is said that sleepwalkers instinctively avoid bumping into furniture or falling out of windows, so Brando never comes to grief. The intellect is dulled but 'something else takes control' – some uncomplicated emotional response linked to pre-natal memory, infantile and innocent [thus he] uncovers many beauties and insights that were never expressed in the medium before. (11)

It is in the context of this “semi-somnambulist” vitality that the works of Alan Burns must be comprehended. The physical manipulation of text is not simply a postmodern technique for demonstrating the pliability of text and for playing with ideas of the authorial originality, it is rather a view which has a real (not Implied) reader in mind. Burns himself is creating works which enter the world as physical books, but these books are themselves objects which each reader has to encounter and, in so doing, will be forced to make use of the “pre-natal”, more authentic aspects of their consciousness in order to negotiate irrational associations of words and images. For Burns this activity is inherently political, as described at the end of *Accident in Art* when quoting from Kurt Schwitters; “the act of putting together two or three innocent objects, such as a railway ticket, a flower, and a bit of wood” may seem to be “an innocent aesthetic affair” (35), yet it is actually stripping these objects of their connection to their owners, “railway companies... gardeners... timber merchants” (36) and “making havoc of the classification system on which the regime is established” (36) in favour of organic networks generated by each individual for themselves. Burns’ “cut-ups” are essentially bound to a new literature which is, in turn, inherently connected to a new society.

4.3: The Experimental Novels of Alan Burns 1961-1973

At a mere seventy-seven pages, it is questionable as to whether Alan Burns’ first published novel, *Buster*, is really a novel at all. Lacking the narrative concision associated with the novella form, it is perhaps more suitable to describe *Buster* as a *bildungsroman* constructed out of a series of chronologically linear but stylistically diverse scenes. It features many aspects of what would come to be a recognisable “Burns style” but, as could be expected for a first novel, it retains many of the “traditional” narrative devices – coherent characters, expository description – that would later disappear. Its first (and currently only) appearance was in the first of Calder Books’ “New Writers” series in 1961. Calder described the “New Writers” project in 1997 thus: “Each volume tried to combine different kinds of literature, experimental or not, occasional poetry, short stories, work in progress of extracts from works are liked, but not enough to publish as a book or on its own” (180). *New Writers 1* featured *The Scala Scare* by Dino Buzzati, a long short story from an established Italian writer translated by Cynthia Jolly, and *The Catfish* by Monique Lange, described as the “newest star in the French literary firmament” whose story, translated by Barbara Wright, appears as a kind of advertisement for her forthcoming British full-length novel debut – *The Plane Trees*. Sandwiched between the two is Alan Burns’ *Buster*, “a young man’s disillusioning view of the post-war world”, the promise of which on the jacket cover lies in its writing being “on a high level”.

Following Dan Graveson, a protagonist whose life parallels the author's in an exaggerated manner, the narrative begins with a claustrophobic wartime childhood before moving through the many failed career attempts of a character typical of the "angry young man against the Establishment" type. The self-destructive quality of his distrust for authority figures begins with an English Literature final exam question, "Dr. Johnson was the Hero of the Age. Discuss." to which he replies that "Johnson was God. And typical of his age. Era of Goodsense worship, sameness the ultimate ideal, piggery and prudery rife, nonsense wisdom, pomposity prestige" (79). Depicted as a "mountain of conventional revulsion, foul-mannered filth loving big boar beast", he describes a bust of Johnson as necessary to any household, as essential as the "great lumping tasteless Victorian grandfather clock", before leaving a considerable space upon the page and ending with the non sequitur, "for I'm modern and fine young man" (79). Although ostensibly an attack on middle class values – their expected conformities and denial of bodily excesses – the language follows the haughty register of the eighteenth century satirists and even includes a number of faux-eighteenth century portmanteaus and onomatopoeias like "nightmareman", "stumpgomp", and "glumping". In many ways it recognises the poetic power of the satiric mode in the same moment that it ridicules those praising it. As such, Dan can be seen to be simultaneously proving himself equal to the established greats whilst making hypocrites of the markers who he knows will fail him in spite of his adoption of their preferred style.[22]

Using authenticity in language as a means of revolt and a justification for attacking those in power is a recurring theme throughout Dan's subsequent failures elsewhere. Having initially joined the army, he then joins the Communist Party and paints "join the movement for peace!" (103) on the ammunition store before describing the properties of weapons to his men by including their cost worked out in terms of "council houses or hospital beds" (109). Out of the army, he attempts the bar exam a number of times, failing each one by asking questions such as; "why in all history a judge has never once said: 'put a sock in it'?" (130). Each attempt at a career involving intellectual labour is undermined by Dan's destructive need to prove himself more intelligent or more authentic than those in power and the novel ends with him returning home to take up a manual job, much to the chagrin of his aspirational working class father. Politically, *Buster* can be seen as an audacious counterargument to that other post-war novel of failure within a meritocratic system, Amis' *Lucky Jim*; where Jim fails by never quite living up to the demands of the Establishment, Dan fails by making a point of his superiority. In this first novel, Burns' vision of authority as inherently contradictory (and for that reason petty and hypocritical) has already forced his most fully formed character out of the narrative. The journey of *Buster* as a *bildungsroman* comes full circle; the traditional novel form has successfully contained Burns' anger, so if he wants to write himself out of the vicious circle he'll have to do something about the novel form.

Traces appear throughout *Buster* of the experimental style which Burns will later adopt consistently. Michael Dennis Browne, in describing his experiences with Burns' writing, explains its peculiarity as reminiscent "of writing a brilliant foreigner might do, one discovering the expressive possibilities of the language by writing in it, taking liberties of usage not knowing them to be liberties" (206). In *Buster* such an approach to writing is celebrated by the protagonist himself, albeit the place of the foreigner learning English

being taken by an adolescent learning to type: “Dan typed on the first sheet, a word: *Onion*. And then, brilliantly: *Man*. *Onion Man*. What a picture! Was there another mind in the school that could have conceived it?” (77). Piecing together words and phrases, seeking to make something new of them, seems applicable to Dan as a character whose only true marker of success is himself. The phrases come out unexpectedly, surprising the writer himself and therefore allowing him the imaginary distance necessary to stand by the writing as good independent of individual ego. Burns writes in *Beyond the Words* of a similar start being made in his own writing when he wrote a poem about a horse galloping across a beach. “I’d seen the horse and the beach separately and put them together,” he writes, “one verse described the horse like the sea ‘breaking across the beach’” (65). The art of the writer in both of these cases is actually more in editing than creating. The writer selects words or images and builds a collage from them that provokes interesting parallels and disjunctions; the process is almost mechanical, denying a sense of “pure inspiration” and creativity, he is not directing actors in a play but cutting together a movie from scenes filmed far apart in space and time.

In his various descriptions of the inspirational moment behind *Buster’s* conception, Burns emphasises the move from word to image in his imagination as both the move from truth to fiction, and from poetry to prose. Suitably for the content of the anecdote, it takes a number of forms in different publications and interviews. In 1981’s *The Imagination on Trial* he pinpoints the moment he spotted “a photograph of a young couple kissing, embracing” (161) in a jeweller’s window that bore an uncanny relation to his parents, who he was attempting at the time to write about. The photograph represented the moment when “I realised I needn’t tackle their psychology or their histories, I could start with a picture” (163). In the *Imagination on Trial* version of the story “a day or two later I got out the family album and started looking at it” (163) and built up *Buster* from there, although he does go on to deny that any other novels began that way as they usually started “not with pictures but with words” (163). In the 1975 *Beyond the Words* version of the story the photograph remains on its own, as a singular problem of uncanny representation – both his parents and not his parents – until he “solved the problem simply by describing the photograph, the image” (64). Once “I described the couple in the photo as if they were my parents when they weren’t really,” Burns became aware that he could similarly review his life in mental images and describe them in sequence (without resorting to a photo album) and also “at the same time discovered I could lie” (64). Perhaps retrospectively inspired by his close friend B.S. Johnson’s mantra that “telling stories is telling lies”, this particular attitude to representation is nevertheless vital to understanding Burns as a novelist. The core of authenticity within his works stems from their initial existence as true images, the closest form of mimesis possible within the twentieth century, which, by dint of their reality, can be manipulated and reappropriated by the creative writer with the good conscience that their fictional world is rooted in some kind of baseline truth.

The unity of Burns’ aesthetic and political vision of creating a literature which liberates humanity’s authentic consciousness is not yet formed in *Buster*, and it is the traditional novel form which appears to restrain it the most. The dialogue and exposition is direct in conveying the righteous anger of the protagonist before becoming more fluid, elaborate and jarring during passages of description. These linguistic flourishes, the products of

transcribed images, are considered by Charles Sugnet as characteristic of the Burns style; “technically what an American composition teacher would chastise as a ‘run-on sentence’...with three main clauses and no conjunction” (196). In a way the style is seeking an authentic and yet poetic description of the image – a purely aesthetic result of innovative new writing methods – but in another way it is seeking to bypass traditions of description, the established way of seeing, and in doing so seeks to represent truth without the weight of expected interpretations. Like his protagonist in *Buster*, Burns is playing the part of the lawyer alienated by the language of litigation and officialdom, telling traditional blasé description to “put a sock in it”. The effect, however, becomes itself alienating, most especially as it appears where certain stock reactions are to be expected. The death of Dan’s mother during a buzzbomb strike is dealt with in a singular, almost banal image, contorted and expanded almost to obscenity:

A policeman wrote in his notebook: *Scratch on left shoe approx. one inch*. The foot had a slight unnatural twist at the ankle. She could not have bent her foot like that if she had been alive. The difference was small, an angle of ten degrees. But alive she could not have done it without breaking the bone, gouging one bone into the other, wrenching the muscle enough to make her scream with pain or come to near as screaming as an ill middle-aged woman can, not a young clean scream, but a choke, a sob, a cough, a constriction in the throat cause by too much trying to escape at one time. Weight is being drawn into the earth, pulled to the middle of it. Her foot weighed. (74)

After the image is introduced in the policeman’s note there follows three explanatory sentences building from the image with increasing objective details. The next sentence, starting with a “but” where the last sentence left off and “running-on” unapologetically, seeks to contain within it the entirety of the emotional reaction through a montage of associated images growing closer to the mother as a person the further they move from the original image. By the end of the paragraph the image is returned to in a state of pure objectivity, emptied of its associated images and dealt with in non-human terms. “Her foot weighed,” an image of the corpse as pure matter, seems to linger between emotional deadness and the pathos such objectivity draws from the reader. Images and their associations are being manipulated here by Burns, although it won’t be until his next novel, *Europe After the Rain*, that the full emotional impact of image manipulation will be utilised in a consistent manner.

In spite of the blurb to *New Writing 1* which promises that Alan Burns is “just now completing” his second novel, *Europe After the Rain* in fact took another four years to publish; appearing in 1965. Set in an ambiguous war-torn European setting, the book revolves around an unnamed and seemingly aimless male protagonist and his dealings with a woman and her father who at different times appear to fight for, and occasionally lead, both the rebels/revolutionary army and a force described as both “loyalist” and “occupying” the nation. Attempts to impose any internal logic upon the situations described are fleeting and often contradictory as the action moves through the wartime landscape on the whims of dreamlike autosuggestion (or Brando-esque somnambulance). David Madden, in his “Introduction to Alan Burns” that opens the Burns edition of the *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, describes the novel like so:

Taking its title from a Max Ernst painting, the novel attempts to take fiction in the

direction of a surrealist painting. The narrative is enveloped in ambiguity – the setting is vague though universal, the characters are unnamed, the motives underlying behaviour are often opaque, and the temporal period could be anytime (110).

In a sense, the novel can then be seen as typifying a certain avant garde style present in a number of contemporary works; the desolate emotional post-war landscapes of Eva Figes' works appearing in novels like *Konek Landing*, Rayner Heppenstall's post-war ennui in *The Connecting Door*, or the *nouveau roman's* emphasis on stasis practiced by Robbe-Grillet. Unlike these works, Burns' novel has a distinct preference for violence and dread over futility and soul-searching, but the wandering quality of the work remains. The choice of the Max Ernst painting's title as one suitable to be "stolen", according to *The Imagination on Trial*, was part of Burns himself finding the work to be "too diffuse and [needing] pulling together" (163). To what extent could this wandering, lost quality – a narrative of ambiguous scenes or images – be considered a product of Burns' working methods can be judged through a number of later interviews and essays.

The fullest account of *Europe After the Rain's* construction appears in *Beyond the Words* and centres around a period where "three accidents happened" (65): the Max Ernst painting appeared at the Tate, in a second-hand bookshop he found "the verbatim record of the Nuremberg trials", and soon after there was published "a journalist's report on life in Poland after the war" that Burns dismissed as a "mere travelogue" in its attempts to avoid real characterisation and analysis. The third book, however, "provided most of the background material," not as a book to be read but to be typed from "in a semi-trance...eyes glazed and in the blur only the sharpest and strongest words, mainly nouns, emerged". After writing down what he could gather in this manner he then "made [his] own sense of them later". Recalling these methods to David Madden in an interview in 1994, Burns describes how the closest he got to the "truth" of the Polish situation came through a cross-reading of these notes with the Nuremberg transcripts; "I do not think I could have found it possible to read books on Polish concentration camps". Believing himself "not capable of journalistic accuracy," Burns focused on creating a "something a lot hazier, yet composed of razor sharp details, splinters of fact". Retrospectively, Burns' account of his working methods placed a large emphasis on his squeamishness, his desire to avoid reality at its most brutal and horrifying, yet the particular emphasis placed upon the Nuremberg trial transcripts would seem to suggest otherwise. As a barrister, Burns would be well aware of the peculiar nature of courtroom formalities (those Dan held so much in contempt in *Buster*) that present both sides with a chance to make their case, to be judged based upon law and reason. The excision of atrocities from the source material that would be capable of eliciting physical disgust, fear, and disbelief can be seen to protect the "editing" mind of the writer from becoming overwhelmed. Rather than imagine the thoughts of one capable of horrors, Burns places his own mind into a series of images and reacts personally with a perhaps equally brutal numbness.

Commenting on *Europe After the Rain* as a book evoking a numbness of feeling, Burns considered it a result of being "concerned with brutality and physical extremity but not with pain" (*Beyond the Words*, 65). This is certainly true of perhaps the most protracted scene of violence in the book, in which the female character is forced by her

father to sleep with the enemy commander in order to assassinate him, but is caught and whipped before the male protagonist. Notably, for the amount of conflicting emotions such a scene would presumably evoke, very little is described in terms of feelings; the sexual content is presented as combat – “he pursued her, she shielded herself”, “his motionless power”, “she furiously hunted” (69) – whilst the violence is presented surgically – “I could see the folded skin, the muscle dislocated, the normal state interfered with...the stretched membrane remained, portions of the membrane stretched in fine threads” (70). Pleasure and pain are reduced to aspects of physical anatomy. In addition to this non-empathetic presentation of the image there is the transference of perspective as characters are on the verge of feeling emotion. The sexually excited commander is viewed by the agent seducing him until the moment when she fails in her objective, at which point the description moves to the commander’s perspective as he subdues her – yet, before he can take sadistic pleasure in punishing her, the scene moves to the detached viewpoint of the male protagonist. Like Burns himself avoiding contact with upsetting material, the narrative voice of *Europe After the Rain* positions itself as a bystander unable to become involved, witnessing from a distance. The reader is implicated in the inhumanity by viewing the scene from such a perspective.

The aesthetic result of *Europe After the Rain*’s numbness is an overall atmosphere of oppressive futility, a detachment from authentic “reality” and any bonds of commitment such authenticity might demand. As Malcolm Bradbury diagnosed “Character and Abstraction” in *The Contemporary English Novel*, we could say that “modern cybernetic and scientific views... seem to have displaced the old ‘character’: figures are paste-ups or cut-outs, role-players or pastiche agents moving through a world of disjunct relations” (185). The purposeful “precariousness and ambiguity” that Burns describes as the central traits of the novel are indeed consciously constructed around such a worldview. In *The Imagination on Trial*, Burns describes linearity as “unavoidable” due to the nature of novel reading, and as such he seeks to make “more obscure those connections” between “what comes next” (164) in the narrative. Again, in a 1997 published interview with Madden, he describes the role of narrator within *Europe After the Rain* as part of this network of obscured connections: “give him a job and the novel becomes reportage... the reader would demand it,” “the narrator’s uncertain role and status is vital” (125). As part of creating the effect of numbness Burns is utilising the techniques of disillusion of character and environment similar to that of Burroughs in his cut-ups, or even Pynchon and the other host of metafiction writers who, supposedly devoid of sentiment, Bradbury labels “totalitarian”. There remains, however, in the lingering images from which the novel was constructed, a haunting presence of the real that on occasion cancels out the distancing effects. From the opening scene set on a bus when we are told that “two passengers could not find their tickets. They were taken off to some sort of centre, or so I was told” (7), there is a sense in which the alienation is “truer” in affect and moves towards the confrontation of the reader with form; a technique that develops into his next novels.

1967’s *Celebrations* represents the high watermark of Alan Burns’ experimental fiction; his own personal favourite, but more importantly also the novel when his “cut-up” techniques and detached style of unpacking images combine to create his most cohesive attack upon traditional form and the bourgeois ideology it is seen to indoctrinate. At this

time, Burns was engaged upon “discovering for myself many of the techniques Burroughs and Gysin describe” (Madden, “Interview”: 1997, 125) and using them as “a political rejection of bourgeois art as a self-indulgence irrelevant to the struggle for social justice, which...perpetuates a system based on exploitation and greed” (*Beyond the Words*, 64). A protracted description by Burns of his workspace in *The Imagination on Trial* describes a Burroughsian cut-up editing studio at its most excessive; “the high technology...consists of a pair of scissors, paste and...a large table top so I can place things side by side... I can spend a day looking for a phrase... I start from chaos and work towards order... I accumulate as large a mass of raw material as possible and then try to order it” (163).[23] It would be a number of years before cassette recorders for speech, film cameras and visual collages would become involved – around the time of *Dreamerika!* in 1972, but the “author as editor of reality” had by 1968 become Alan Burns’ definitive working methodology. The novel itself is described in *Beyond the Words* as rising up from these cut-up practices almost of its own accord. Burns consciously delayed “until the last minute any notion of what the book was about” (66); rather, the piecemeal work fell organically into the categories of “heavy public rituals: marriages, funerals, wakes” (66) and began to show “a strange consistency in choice of characters. With no preconception or conscious decision I repeated my family pattern” (65/66). The resulting novel is a long power struggle between the son, Michael, and the father, Williams, over the factory where they work that they come to own, the house where they live, and the affections of the other brother, Philip, and later Philip’s widow, Jacqueline. Starting from a maelstrom of words and images, Burns constructed a family saga; effectively tearing the bourgeois novel apart and sticking it back together again in a radical process of reappropriation.

When considering the effect that this process of endless, semi-conscious cutting-up had upon the text itself it is tempting to look first at the sentence structures (which are, after all, highly erratic at times), however, it is in the described content, retained from the raw material, where the most important stylistic innovations can be seen. The numbed, emotionless and brutal atmosphere of *Europe After the Rain* remains as the central aesthetic of Burns’ quasi-Imagist style, but what has been introduced along with the everyday settings are objects. Household items, clothing, machinery, food and furnishings: all the stuff of production and consumption has entered into the spaces between characters. The central conflict between Williams and Michael regarding control of the company takes place almost entirely through machinery and physical objects - their personal conversations remaining familial albeit cold. William’s rise from the proletariat begins with his invention of a machine, the function of which is negligible, that “strove to create the perfect rhythm of work to be done in any weather...if there was any muscular exertion it was not apparent...there was a tendency for sweat to be regarded as an anachronism now...morale became a substance with a practical use... reduced to a mark on a graph” (7). Once in charge of the factory he “ordered that no variation in working conditions be permitted, the windows were to remain shut in winter and summer... at first the men found it a little difficult to acclimatise themselves...but soon it became a pleasant thing” (31). Williams, as the man in control of the machines, holds power over his workers in a direct sense by using them as objects. It is these objects that make up the broken images of conflict when Michael creates his own machine and takes power: “thirty frozen people were produced in evidence, smashed machines lay instead of food upon the

tables" (89). To the new machines Michael presents "a box of rivets and a little silver medal", as to the wives of the thirty dead workers he presents "'as new' washing machines... dug out of the mud, trucked back and cleaned with compressed air" (111). Power over people is made identical with power over objects which, in the endless forward-march of capitalist production, is a power conferred on those that control the means of production. Piecing together narrative from the raw materials of culture, Burns ends up replacing emotional attachments between individuals with economic production and object-relations.

The characters themselves - when they are not objects to be appropriated or destroyed by other characters - are constructed out of objects. Williams sees himself as the force that drives the company, a living embodiment of each of its functions:

I acquired the capital...I was enterprising... I knew the value of my own invention... I showed them the frame... I eliminated dangerous bends and projections... I placed a mirror to satisfy the vanity... I would not have my customers moved sharply, I protected them like eggs. I strapped them in against flexible shelves that folded upwards. (39)

All aspects of production are brought together in Williams as director of the company and living embodiment of all action taking part on the company's behalf. As such, a sense not only of power but also of meaning is imparted upon Williams. The purpose of Williams as a character becomes economic in all relations once Burns has removed pain and pleasure from his texts. Williams' sole "romantic" attachment in the novel, Jacqueline, exists functionally as the dead son Phillip's property contested between brother and father. Jacqueline herself is measured in her worth as an advanced technological object - "subject to an experiment that turned it blue... she was recognised by her remarkable hair...thus she advanced science" - and falls out of use when "her tests and experiments were discredited [and] the papers followed a new lead" (113). Even the most surreal of Burns' description draw upon the forward motion of technology as imperative to worth; after Phillip's body "was buried [and] turned to earth" it is yet to be free of the demands of innovation as only after a considerable time inanimate is he described as having "no further interest in science, in new ideas or violent action" (20). In *Celebrations*, Burns succeeds in writing the novel that Burroughs was criticised for but never fully succeeded in creating; a narrative of the contemporary age that replaces emotion with economics, humans with objects: an entirely anti-humanist novel.

Returning from this point to consider some of the other critical reactions to Alan Burns' work we can see how this development of an anti-humanist style of novel, born from an anti-bourgeois writing methodology, extends its attitudes and aesthetics throughout their many concerns. Michael Dennis Brown, whose piece in the *Review of Contemporary Fiction* identifies "the indirect speech quality in much of the allegedly direct speech between the characters" (207), describes the non-empathetic relationships between his characters in terms of their alienation from the workings of the world; yet it could be seen that it is these very workings that, through the cut-up method, have created this alienation. Other critics have identified with an opposite reaction, such as Neugeboren who describes Burns' texts as attempts to "show us...the texture of life lived" (209). The

contradictions between describing the “realistic” economic make-up of life under capitalism and conveying “realistic” human emotions arise everywhere in Burns’ texts. It is perhaps for this reason that a return to authorial intent is needed with experimental texts such as these – not to “explain” the text entirely, but as a guide for untangling their internal contradictions with reference to their context and to avoid the temptation to perform an ahistorical deconstruction which would undermine Burns’ contemporary radicalism.

The reason behind that short interlude regarding authorial intent becomes clear when we consider 1969’s *Babel*; a novel that, without some grasp of context or intent, could not unfairly be described as bordering on meaningless. Sentences like “Marlon Brando watched Hamlet, laughed at a phrase in it, held the world in a drink, ran from the office in tears” (115), appear without explanation between longer paragraphs, also unconnected in terms of narrative or content, in a way that obscures patterns of reading both imaginatively and occasionally even linguistically. The text does, however, contain certain recurrent themes – sex, religion, war, law – that, like the characters in *Celebrations* are connected through a maelstrom of object-relations. Burns, in the 1997 Madden interview, described the text as “a network of recurrent images... not mechanical, exact repetition, but a near-miss, a variation close enough to give the reader that satisfying sense of recognition” (129). Like Burroughs’ cut-ups, *Babel* is reconstructing association blocks but, unlike Burroughs, Burns is doing so with an admitted eye to reader response. The vast array of raw material collected and “edited” by Burns was for him a process of taking “everything that the big city threw away, everything it lost, everything it despised, everything it crushed underfoot” (112) and presenting it back to his readers as “art” (the work-in-progress title of *Babel* was itself “Art By Accident”, suggesting the theoretical work *Accident in Art* may have also been in Burns’ mind at this time). The process of creation begins with what has already been consumed by capitalism. Ephemeral advertisements, pulp fiction, found objects discarded by their original owners - the waste of yesterday’s culture with its built-in obsolescence is thrown back into cultural production. As a result, the sections can be taken or left in different orders, alone or in blocks, and have as much or as little read into them as seems fitting: much like popular culture under the eye of the media studies scholar. The overall effect, however, is always one of intense defamiliarisation.

When talking of *Babel*, Burns later either admits – as he does in *The Imagination on Trial* – that he had “fragmented himself out of existence” (164), or else conjures external contextual and social backgrounds by which he appears to want the novel to be read.[24] By implication, the text as “a text” is identified less as a novel than as a pamphlet, banner, newsletter, or a “happening”, to draw on a distinctly late-Sixties art form. To David Madden he openly talks of such a context as essential to understanding the text:

Start not with a method but with a mood. The novel was published in 1969, written in 1967 and 1968. High Days and Holidays, it was a time to be alive! Events of Paris, “things happening” in London too. The great anti-war...demo outside the US embassy (there with my wife, met BS. Johnson and others), and a so called Assembly of Artists, met in a warehouse by the Thames, and so on. Writers Reading founded then also... I had a feeling I was part of a general upsurge. I thought we were going to win! (128)

From 1997, Burns takes the view that *Babel* was part of “the Sixties” - albeit a “Sixties” not recuperated entirely into the popular de-politicised postmodern image, but more in keeping with the trajectory outlined in the introduction to this thesis. This inseparability of the book and its context, of the text and the entire culture, is perhaps also why Burns’ coverage of *Babel* in his “Essay” on writing in *Beyond the Words* barely name-checks the cut-up technique before immediately moving on to an essay about the ideological state apparatus:

It was about the power of the state. How in every street, every room, every shop, every workplace, every school, every institution, and particularly in every family, the essential pattern of power relations is dictated by the underlying rules, assumptions and moral principles of the State. *Babel* described not the obvious apparatus of dictatorship but the hints nudges nods assents implications agreements and conspiracies, the network of manipulations that envelops the citizens and makes them unaware accomplices. (67)

For Burns the project of *Babel*, his most “experimental” work (in the basic sense that it contains the least traditional aspects; no story, characters, plot, and a lack of standardised grammar), is in a way closest to his vision of the world and of art. It is as if the book itself is his purest conflict against the system, embodying what he stands for, leaving him unable to engage with it as a work on its own terms. There is also the question of how much Burroughs’ influence at this time was making the cut-up form recognisable if not acceptable; *Nova Express*, the last of the “cut-up trilogy” appears in 1964 and *Dead Fingers Talk* appeared from Calder in 1963. A reader of experimental fiction would likely recognise the cut-up form – it was therefore up to Burns to explain what he was personally bringing to it.

Looking at a section of the novel we can see how the process of editing raw material into new, defamiliarising text does inspire in the reader a kind of “shifting of associations”:

Millions lick their wives. The death houses are bricked up. Police protect their lives. Energetic foreigners increase trade, the quick-witted work in the central market. The city is force, the Minister of Order determines policy with the concurrence of representatives...The city cannot feed itself. Cows are edible. An abattoir was set up. Water is purchased... Electricity is supplied, the modern power is fired with dust. Horses are abolished. There are private cars. Trains go in and out. The underground is low owing to the low ground (111).

Collections of unusual turns of phrase – “the city is force”, “cows are edible”, “horses are abolished” – are mixed with images that are evocative yet of uncertain meaning – “death houses”, “modern power is fired with dust”. The section is bookended by an image of questionable connection to the rest (outside, perhaps, of the police protecting the licked wives’ lives) and a near-tautology. As a result, the reader is instigated by the unusual image into making connections, imaginative and metaphorical leaps, between the proceeding images. Once they reach the final tautology, the associative train of thought reaches an arbitrary logic loop (the low underground is under the low ground) which creates a sort of feedback of arbitrariness affecting the entire meaning of the passage. The reader is essentially forced to work out a tenuous inner logic to understand the passage and is then led to understand that this logic is self-evident. Various techniques

are used in the many and heterogeneous sections that make up *Babel* but all result in similar distancing effects.

Considering Burns' attitude to *Babel* is one closely associated with intense radical political feeling, it does not seem appropriate to categorise these distancing effects either as purely ends in themselves or as an aesthetic engine for expressing conservative disgust at modern society (as Morgan depicts Burroughs' work). More appropriate perhaps, is to read the work as a radical New Left demonstration of a society in need of change. The reader is expected to break from traditions of seeing and thus gain an "elevated consciousness" with which to offer new and revolutionary solutions to the old "established" problems of capitalist society. The revolutionary intention buried within *Accident in Art* returns here with its implied sense of an authentic being waiting to be released by experimental practice; a utopian future submerged between the elements of modern life which a dramatic shift in consciousness would bring to the fore. Simon Choat identifies this kind of thinking as the poststructuralist era's key improvement upon traditional Marxist "vulgar materialism"; the "iron law of history" is replaced by an "immanent potential [that] should not be confused with inevitability: it does not mean that the seeds of the future will grow inexorably from the present. It is not the predetermination of the future but the connection of the future with the present" (164). The act of creating *Babel* was for Burns an authentic means of connecting to contemporary society through writing with that society's own artefacts. The process of cutting-up disrupts existing linguistic patterns used to explain the way things are and forces the things themselves to present their own internal logics. The form is an absolute refusal of the traditional Aristotelian structure, the particular meaning of which is described by Milton Friedman in terms of a beginning "where the problem to be resolved is first raised, the middle constitutes the search for a solution, and the end is where the problem is resolved" (65-66). The novel that solves its own problems may not always be conservative, but it certainly presupposes a finality to the textual form that begins and ends with narrative. A text like *Babel* demands the interpretation of uncertain forms within the act of reading it, disrupting solutions in an open-ended fashion that implies the continuation of "shifting associations" beyond the text. Alan Burns' intention for *Babel* was therefore half political-pamphlet, half puzzle-book: reading it would be a kind of "happening".[25]

Burns' next novel, *Dreamerika!* (1972), in many ways takes the breakthroughs of *Babel* in terms of reader-responsiveness and channels them into a topic less ambiguous than simply "the State". Ostensibly its central focus is print culture and, more specifically, the Kennedys. The sections of type in *Dreamerika!* are interspersed with actual headlines from magazines, newspapers, and other assorted publications (*Beyond the Words*, 67). The resulting effect serves to make juxtapositions more readily decipherable as readers can draw on their experiences with these periodical mediums, the reading style of which is far more "cut-up" than the "top-left to bottom-right" manner of approaching a novel. The Kennedys were chosen in a manner similar to J.G. Ballard's use of Marilyn Monroe and Ronald Reagan in works like *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970); as an example of a universal storyline "much like the Greek and Roman gods – part of the common language, common reference points, myth", and which also resulted in the "Surrealist Fantasy" subtitle being added by a libel-conscious John Calder (Madden, 1997: 131). The subtitle

never sat well with Burns, however, who considered surrealism to mean “supertrue” (132) and fantasy to mean “irrational” (and “with nuclear bombs around, we must be careful not to get too far into the irrational” (124)). A portmanteau followed by an oxymoron, although suitable for the interior of the text, was perhaps distancing the empirical too far in terms of the title.

The Kennedy storyline is so warped and distorted from actual historical events in *Dreamerika!* that one is forgiven for assuming that Burns was simply pursuing the same concerns as he did in *Babel* only with recognisable character names and storyline attached. Under an advertisement – “THINK BIG” – Burns rails at technocratic imperialism: “The purpose of USA [sic] is concern with the problem of geometry, expanding the circumference of the free world... the brutality of number... the global sum demanded, will enable the arithmetic men to take over” (25). Images of a student protest being violently attacked by the police are interspersed with tabloid-style headlines: “Whose Children?”, “Police in New Shock”, “Obsessed with Violence”, “An Outrage!”, “Poor Little Rich Girl” (58-59). At Jack Kennedy’s funeral, Bobby “sat by a chair in front of the corpse and sawed through the flesh, carefully separating the muscles” (67) to pull his heart out. The final scenes that convey Jackie Kennedy’s marriage to Aristotle Onassis are presented in phantasmagorical, Lewis Carroll-style images of insane wealth intercut with saccharine phrases from women’s magazines; some, such as “Clichés Can Come True” (112), delivered with a barbed sarcasm. Perhaps owing to the juxtaposition of tone between the cut-out headlines and the cut-up described images, *Dreamerika!* begins to take on many of the qualities of satire. The violence and grotesquery, as free of pain as it was in *Europe After the Rain*, takes on a certain Swiftian quality when enacted upon identifiable individuals, and the reappropriation of newsprint to critique media practice had been a staple of *Private Eye* since its inception in 1961.

The satirical turn in *Dreamerika!* raises a number of issues regarding Burns’ experimental project and its credentials as simultaneously radical and formally innovative. Speaking to David Madden in 1994, Burns implies that his writing of the novel was no longer a project arising organically from the raw material but had, from the start, a readily identifiable target in the hypocrisy of America as a hegemonic power: whilst on a visit to the country “I saw Dickensian poverty, faces and bodies mutilated by bad diet and living conditions... I was appalled”. The processes of *Babel*, distorting a worldview by fracturing its images and “shifting association blocks”, become very similar to simply mocking by exaggeration when an identifiable target is being attacked in the process. The radical conservative visions of Burroughs are at their most evocative when they express his fear and loathing of humanity, and later in his life he returned to the cut-up method as a way of placing curses upon enemies by cutting together images of them at different times and places. This is not to say that satire is inherently misanthropic – and certainly not always practiced with the evil intent of Burroughs’ black magic - but in Burns’ case the move on from *Babel*, the novel he attempted to capture all of society within, is a reduction in scope. The utopian revolutionary becomes the dissenting provocateur.

As I have written about more fully elsewhere, in Alan Burns and B.S. Johnson’s simultaneous turn to terrorism as a subject matter in their novels of 1973 there is a sense

in which the burn-out of the cultural revolutionary moment of the late Long Sixties is compounded by the failure to stop the 1971 Industrial Relations Act being passed and the political imaginations of these two disappointed writers, as a result turn from mass movements and grand ideas to the desperation of terrorism (Darlington, "Cell of One"(2014)). The Angry Brigade, an anarchist urban guerrilla organisation made up of the dissatisfied products of post-war meritocracy (with a mix of backgrounds similar to, and overlapping with, the Sixties experimental literary scene) did indeed take to bombing and sabotage, landing themselves in prison after the "Stoke Newington Eight" trial of 1972. Both Johnson and Burns attended the trial to watch from the public galleries and The Angry Brigade went on to inspire *The Angry Brigade*, Burns' first relatively traditional novel since *Buster*. Reputedly inspired by Heinrich Boll's Nobel Prize acceptance speech in which he argued that political novels needed to be written in "the language of the people" to be effective, Burns structures his novel around the radicalisation of a group of six fictional people, all of whom present their opinions through cuttings from interview transcripts (*The Imagination on Trial*, 164). "Needless to say it was fiction," Burns later wrote in *The Imagination on Trial*, "those 'interviews' were mainly conducted with my friends on topics quite other than those discussed by the characters in the book" (164).[26] The "real" raw materials from which Burns was building his novel were no longer the ephemera of consumer capitalism but rather the human opposite; the emotions of real people expressed in their own natural speech patterns. No longer taking on the State leviathan and its multitudinous systems of oppression in one big push, Burns was now fighting a guerrilla war that turned the everyday emotions of life into a narrative of violent rebellion. Alongside these emotions, Burns' other "raw material" was becoming similarly associated with guerrilla warfare – a letter to B.S. Johnson held in the British Library thanks him for "the manual of the urban guerrilla", and laments that "I still don't know how to make a BOMB!".

In many ways *The Angry Brigade* represents a wish-fulfilment fantasy of revolution latent throughout Burns' experimental works and a simultaneous renunciation of that fantasy. Burns utilises the ambiguity behind the non-specific aims, objectives and targets of the real Angry Brigade as a means of framing his own political project within a recognisable contemporary reality. The targets of the characters in *The Angry Brigade* are the targets of Burns' own revolutionary mission: the "total brainwashing" (5) that keeps people from realising their authenticity and potential. The revolutionary methods also seem to reflect his own. The climax of the novel, in which the Ministry of Housing in Whitehall is occupied, is described in terms of "a series of semi-theatrical situations" (93). The attack is conceived as aleatoric theatre where "we predicted exactly what would happen and prepared for each possibility" (93); during a later attack they explain that "in guerrilla actions you have to play it by ear" (182). The technique of managed chaos is reminiscent of *Palach* and Burns' sense of Brando-esque unscripted authenticity, as well as implying that a utopian, unconscious root lies beneath all revolutionary activity. When the Angry Brigade disseminate a "Pamphlet on the Violence of the State" they are even seen to engage in impromptu cutting-up; "We'd walk through the carriages. It was a Happening. We'd tear a page in half, here's a half, here's a half, get together and read it" (61). The speaker even proposes that "if some kid of eighteen picks up one of our pamphlets in ten years' time, he'll be so attuned to underground consciousness that he'll relate to it" (61). One could be forgiven for suggesting that Burns

is using this character as a mouthpiece for his experimental intention. Burns almost describes it as such; “the Angry Brigade is about actual concepts rather than intellectual concepts. It’s about the fundamental fantasies, dreams, madnesses of mankind” (167). The effect, however, of placing these statements in the mouths of characters demonstrably shown to be flawed is that the revolutionary mission is no longer demonstrated but described, and described in a dismissive manner. By reframing the experimental content within a traditional form, the narrative itself appears to undermine the message Burns is attempting to present. In many ways it is a justification of Sixties experimental literatures’ fundamental assertion that new forms are necessary – yet it is also, in being a traditional narrative itself, a rejection of those values. In writing about the Angry Brigade as ideologically laudable yet inevitably doomed romantics, Alan Burns could – consciously or not - be said to be writing about himself and his fellow experimental novelists as the Sixties comes to an end.

Speaking in the Madden interview, Burns claimed that the novel was written in sympathy with the actual Angry Brigade (or at least the Stoke Newington Eight) and was an attempt to “correct [the tabloid] version of red-baiting, by showing the true process of radicalisation” (115). After the book was published and was “generally seen as an attack on the ‘real’ Angry Brigade”, including in an angry letter to *Time Out* written by Stuart Christie, Burns recounts his frustration; “the darned thing is I wrote the novel in protest against... the demonising” (128). Such frustration, as well as an assortment of disillusioning factors, spells the end of Burns’ novel writing until 1981’s *The Day Daddy Died*. *The Angry Brigade* could perhaps be considered as a final spelling out of his intentions as an experimenter with the novel form but, framed in a non-experimental form, it is also an unconscious distancing from those earlier beliefs. The culmination of his cut-up, transcription, found material, audio recording as well as a host of other techniques into a readable “documentary novel” about both counter-culture and urban guerrilla warfare could almost be read as an attempt to clarify the role Burns had envisioned for himself throughout the Sixties. Once the “High Days and Holidays” that birthed *Babel* gave way to the depression, struggle and turmoil of the Seventies, *The Angry Brigade* appears as a final attempt at a clear enunciation of his message; one that is, perhaps inevitably, misinterpreted as attacking the exact people it was aimed at supporting. In the move away from “experiments” in language and image that confront the reader, however, the dynamic radicalism of Burns’ disruptive prose is replaced by an attempt at realism which sits awkwardly with Burns’ approach. Concerning “experimental” literature in terms of the particular form it inhabited in the Sixties, what *The Angry Brigade* suggests is that – for Burns at least – the moment for formal innovation and consciousness-raising is over and a new moment of conflict has begun; the materiality of which undermines his claims to radical newness and perceives his texts as the “bourgeois avant garde” form he had always considered himself against. In terms of tracing the British experimental novel’s trajectory through the Sixties, the career of Alan Burns is quintessential.

Chapter 5: “Another City, Same Hotel”: Ann Quin and the Happening Society

5.1: The Permissive Moment

Before addressing the works of Ann Quin directly it is important to present the context in which they originally appeared.[27] The graphic sexual content of Quin’s works operates as part of an aesthetic whole and, as such, does not necessarily warrant comment in and of itself. However, such is the nature of censorship that such a nuanced literary approach is only available once the threat of government prosecution has been lifted. As well as the many other favourable conditions that we have seen playing a role in shaping the Sixties cultural boom, an understanding of the nature of the “permissive society” is essential. Yet it would be remiss to presume that the relaxation of censorship is a simple case of liberty increasing as time goes on. In addressing the Sixties it is much more effective historically to think of a “permissive moment” beginning sometime after the Lady Chatterley Trial in 1960 and coming to an end with the Oz Trial of 1971. The Seventies backlash redrew debates on censorship in ways that have reverberated ever since and a failure to account for such historical changes blinds us to the dramatic cultural debates of which Ann Quin’s writing is part.

Writing in his study on modern censorship *Freedom’s Frontier*, Donald Thomas presents the context of the Chatterley Trial as directly related to the new 1959 Obscene Publications Act. “With a new law in place,” according to Thomas’ account, “the next step was a test case” (241). From this perspective, the “obscenity” of Lawrence’s novel was not so exceptional as to demand government intervention, but was rather the unlucky scapegoat upon which the crown could test its new powers. In terms of the content leading to the obscenity charge “language was the problem. There remained a presumption that the use of certain words in print was criminal [and these] the Prosecuting council was to point out as meticulously as an abacus” (242). With these particular offending words listed and presented to the jury as sufficient evidence of obscenity, the case then fell to the defence to prove that – in spite of this – the work was overall “for the public good, as being in the interests of literature, art or science” (243). The issue then became one of taste and, more specifically, a perceived patriarchal set of standards determined by whether “you would wish your wife or servants to read” the novel. The “not guilty” verdict reached may have set in motion a number of revolutionary changes in terms of cultural freedoms, but the terms upon which it was reached remained strictly determined by the Establishment. In order to determine obscenity, it is implied, one must either be male and bourgeois, or else defer to the tastes and morality of those that are.

By 1971, however, the terms upon which the Oz Trial determined obscenity had monumentally shifted, with the debate resulting in the longest obscenity trial in British legal history. Published between the passing of the “guilty” verdict and the overturn by appeal, Tony Palmer’s account of the proceedings, *The Trials of Oz*, bears witness to the breadth of both sides’ sociocultural concerns. By pasting Rupert the Bear’s head onto a Robert Crumb cartoon strip, *Oz 28* set the scene for a clash of civilisations. For the prosecution, the magazine appeared as “nothing more or less than propaganda” that “left you with an ugly taste in your mouth” which represented “the very epitome... of the so-called permissive society” (193). In response, the defence argued that,

those who grew up in the early fifties were known as the 'Silent Generation'... but suddenly it became too dangerous to be complacent any longer. Old gentlemen with cigars and curly moustaches could push buttons which might blow up the whole world. So young people came into the streets with their duffel coats and guitars to protest. (235)

The very fate of the world is seen to be at stake and in judging whether or not an image of a woman wearing a strap-on dildo is obscene the jury could be dooming the nation to either a future of absolute depravity or nuclear holocaust. The bathetic quality of this discourse is emphasised by the prurience and humourlessness of the prosecution when dissecting the magazine in question and the wilful refusal of the defence to accept any possibility of offence being caused. That "nobody objected to taking schoolchildren to art galleries where they could frequently see 'ladies with little attire on'" (140) appeared to be the end of the debate on "protecting" children from nudity, as far as the Oz editorial staff was concerned. Such an attitude, perhaps even more controversial today than in 1971, illustrates how our reading of the "permissive society" cannot be reduced to liberal concerns about the state and free speech. The radical conception of a totally repressive society in need of liberation challenges the fundamental premises of such a "rational" and "objective" bourgeois approach. It is this figure of the sexual revolutionary that frames the wandering of *Passages* and haunts the sado-masochistic orgies of *Tripticks* in the figure of "Nightripper".

The "revolutionary" case against censorship was not, however, the only case – nor even a popular one during the Sixties. A consideration of the BBC's increasing creative freedom under Hugh Greene and "anti-Establishment" satire such as *Private Eye* seeking the liberalisation of libel law demonstrates how "mainstream" such opinions were becoming.^[28] It is against this general Sixties "permissiveness" that Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers and Listeners Association (or NVALA) positioned itself and, as a result, could also frame its debate as "anti-Establishment"; standing against what it believed to be a corrupt, decadent, and left-wing propagandist state media.^[29] Although largely brushed aside during the Sixties heyday of "permissiveness", the overturning of the Oz Trial verdict led NVALA to launch the Nationwide Petition for Public Decency, a "plea for a strengthening of the obscenity laws" (Thompson, 275) which reached 1,350,000 signatories by April 1973. This petition arguably set in motion the expansion of censorship in the form of the Broadcasting and Television Act 1974. From the perspective of NVALA and those in sympathy with their cause, the slackening of obscenity laws was not a series of gradual victories against those in power but rather an on-going imposition by the powerful who were promoting attitudes calculated to erode traditional ways of life. Censorship was therefore a question of social responsibility, albeit one driven by authoritarian Christian values.

The frame of reference for obscenity was largely defined by cinema and television in public debate. Although this debate certainly had an impact upon the literary production of the Sixties – cinema being a key influence upon Quin's *Tripticks*, for example - the "permissive moment" that had so liberated the printed word had its closest correlative in theatrical production. Unlike broadcast media or the mass-market film, theatre appears only in the moment of its action upon the stage (or beyond the stage, as shall be seen in the case of *Happenings*). This not only left it relatively untouched by arguments concerning "captive

audiences”, but – more importantly – also placed it under a different regulatory body. Until 1968 this was the Lord Chamberlain’s Office. Having been “repeatedly exposed as inefficient, unfair and absurd” (148), according to Richard Findlater, “several managers, for the first time in a century, had actually joined playwrights, actors and critics in supporting its abolition” (149). A government enquiry, launched in 1966, resulted in the Theatres Act of 1968 which essentially abolished formal public censorship of theatrical productions in Britain. Such a move can be seen to be deeply rooted within the cultural-economic climate of the time with the satire boom, adaptations of the novels of the “Angry Young Men”, and playwrights like Joe Orton (whose central premise, according to John Lahr was that there were “no basic human values. Man was capable of every bestiality” (7)) achieving great success and critical acclaim. The potential for censorship or obscenity charges to upset a successful theatre run added an undesirable level of precariousness at a time when the “permissive society” was good business and “Swinging London” was driving a boom in consumption. Its removal was of obvious benefit to West End theatre, but also opened up space for the new, radical forms in which Quin was involved.

When considering the British cultural landscape in regards to the “permissive moment” literature and theatre arise as the two privileged spaces of cultural production. Once the novelty of free expression had become stale and oppositional shock-tactics tired these spaces would eventually present forums for the exploration of “permissiveness” as a radical state of being.[30] By considering Ann Quin, whose life and works enjoy considerable interplay between these spaces, we can therefore engage with the “permissive society” on its own terms as both a product of and a conduit for experimental practice. More than any other writer in this thesis, Quin presents an intersection between the diffuse networks of radicalism and liberalism, working class and bourgeois forms, feminist theory and sexuality, and the transatlantic movements, circles, concepts, and environments that created the grand cultural signifier now collectively known as “the Sixties”. By reading her works within this historical context, their deep ambiguities of character, narrative and expression emerge as traumas of liberation starkly prescient of the historical path leading to our contemporary condition.

5.2: Desublimation Through Style

The writing of Ann Quin has never drawn the levels of critical attention that the likes of Christine Brooke-Rose or B.S. Johnson have received – although, as with B.S. Johnson, Quin seems to be making an academic reappearance in the twenty-first century. A writer from a South-East working class background whose novels were published by John Calder – a company synonymous with challenge and experiment – her works carry much of the cultural ambiguity that she herself represents as a figure. From the gritty Brighton setting of her first novel, *Berg* (1964), to the comic-strip pop culture of her last completed novel, *Tripticks* (1972), Quin’s work often draws upon the material and mental poverty of proletarian experience in order to create its otherworldly narratives and phantasmagoric imagery. In his piece in *Context No. 8*, “Reading Ann Quin’s *Berg*”, Giles Gordon introduces her in the context of the other experimental writers, part of a group “concerned about the novel as art form”. For these writers, the breakthroughs of writers like Alan Sillitoe or John Braine represented “working class vernacular posing as social realism” and that a “novel for the times” must have more of the qualities of being “manufactured

by tape recorder, a verbal equivalent of *cinema verite*". It is a theme Gordon returns to in his introduction to the reprinted edition of Quin's *Berg*, suggesting that "here was a working class voice from England quite unlike any other, [combining] the theatrical influences of John Osborne [with] the technical advances of the *nouveau roman*" (ix). The desire to be "more real" than social realism through experiment seems to be the key to accessing Quin's style from an academic perspective.

On a purely stylistic level, Quin's novels already present a challenge to the critic. Her ability to utilise polyphony not only between individual subjects but within and across subjects marks a radical break not only from traditional notions of monologue and dialogue but also from the kind of "ontological levels" that McHale considers central to postmodernism. Rather than offer distinct levels and subjectivities that become more fragmented, Quin offers a literature of osmosis wherein nothing remains stable yet everything is connected. Evenson and Howard, in their article "Ann Quin", describe this flow through a visual metaphor in which "the narration functions like an invasive camera, with actions and events unfolding cinematically, simultaneously with the dialogue and the narration". However, whereas such techniques create a natural mimetic language in cinema, Quin's appropriation of a similar approach results in an "almost unique claustrophobic equalisation of the narration; one moves from one narrative level to another abruptly and often without warning". The "invasive camera" doesn't produce a detached cinematic gaze but the dizzying totality of complete immersion, a sense of drowning in sensation.

An excellent example of the kind of writing for which Quin receives critical praise is presented within the first pages of her first novel, *Berg*, where the titular character is presented to the reader in his boarding house room with the *mise en scene* (to refer back to a cinematic terminology) provoking expressions of past and future experiences;

Once he had ventured across, and brought back a giggling piece of fluff, that flapped and fluttered, until he was incapable, apologetic, a dry fig held by sticky hands. Well I must say you're a fine one, bringing me all the way up here, what do you want then, here are you blubbering, oh go back to Mum. Lor' wait until I tell them all what I got tonight, laugh, they'll die. Longing to be castrated; shaving pubic hairs. Like playing with a doll, rising out of the bath, a pink jujube, a lighthouse, outside the rocks rose in body, later forming into maggots that invaded the long nights, crawled out of sealed walls, and tumbled between the creases in the sheets (4).

From the first sentence, appearing in context in the middle of a longer paragraph, the memory of an unsuccessful sexual encounter is delivered in the third person, second person and then with a reduced use of personal pronouns. The "invasive camera" would appear to move between present, past and delirious states all held within the character-space of Berg. The transmogrifications of the phallus move through impotent "dry fig", feminine plaything "doll", landscape "lighthouse", and finally numerous invading contaminations in the form of nocturnal "maggots". Quin's use of language here negotiates a certain cosmic unity of symbols which subsumes subject and object alike under a symbolic order which transgresses linear time and physical laws in a kind of total pathetic fallacy.

For different critics, Quin's "claustrophobic" literature presents different challenges to established literary practice. Lee Rourke, writing in *The Independent*, finds that her writing (and most especially *Berg*) "simply eschews the superfluous dilly-dallying of our established humanistic tradition and cuts straight to place, movement and time". In

having a scalpel-like ability to cut directly into the real, Quin's writing sidesteps not only the formal aspects of "traditional" novels but also the "humanistic" ideology of the sacrosanct individual which informs those forms. Philip Stevick too highlights the anti-humanist capacity of Quin's writing to denigrate the unity of the individual over experience, suggesting that most dialogue "is not remembered conversation. No such conversation has taken place, or will" (232). Rather, for Stevick, Quin's novels present "the mind as a theatre both of remembered wound and of desire... the subject is the leading character with the best lines, often the only lines" (232). Loraine Morley unpacks further these elements of desire, describing Quin's writing as "'promiscuous'; in the sense that it no more concerns itself with consistency either of textual or sexual identity than with supporting a sociocultural tradition of monogamy" (128). Quin's novels are scalpels, love affairs, theatres; all subsuming the rational and objective - the individual - to a sense of unbounded vitality. The novels stage the collapse of all repressive structures the more directly to live within the flow of experience itself.

The reduction in censorship provides the context to Quin's writing, not simply with regards to its provocative content but also in terms of the honesty which such content implies. Quin finds in the removal of physical barriers between people a possibility to dissolve the emotional and ideological barriers structuring bourgeois society. Her stylistic practice, a sort of communal consciousness, emerges through the collapse of "restraint"; a concept absolutely central to individualistic consciousness. Only within this privileged space at this historical moment could these novels emerge as they do – explorations of liberation not in the sense of individual liberty but as a mode of being. In writing of such a moment in *Eros and Civilisation*, Herbert Marcuse contends that it is at this level of civilisation when social repression no longer takes the form of prohibition, but is built into the ideological mode of enjoyment and "free expression". This reconciliation of freedom with repression involves a unity of being the likes of which we find expressed in Quin's works:

Imagination envisions the reconciliation of the individual with the whole, of desire with realisation, of happiness with reason... The truths of imagination are first realised when phantasy itself takes form, when it creates a universe of perception and comprehension – a subjective and at the same time objective universe. This occurs in *art*. (Marcuse, 144)

For this reconciled subject, the idea of repression as an externally imposed prohibition is held in contempt in the fashion of the Oz Trial defendants when faced with obscenity charges; the law appears artificial, arbitrary, absurd. For the "permissive society" the only limits imposed should be internal limits which, in turn, can only be realised in a context of total liberty in order to exist for-themselves. However, for all the "freedom" that this permissiveness entails, the actuality is perhaps more repressive, according to Marcuse. Finn Bowring examines Marcuse's concept of "repressive desublimation" in his 2012 paper; describing it as "a relaxing of those taboos that previously required the deflection of the instincts, but this relaxation remains repressive in its overall logic and effect" (16). The subject has, at this "level of civilisation", internalised repression to the extent that the demands of desire are structured into repressive models for the benefit of reproducing the dominant mode of production.

When considering Quin's ability to write between subjectivities, effectively resulting in a stream-of-consciousness overflowing individual consciousnesses, Philip Stevick notes how "reading backwards from Quin, one is struck by the incredible sweetness of temper in most of those classic characters in the modernist literature of the inner life" (233). Compare the use of classical mythology in *Ulysses* and the ruminations of Bloom to its more "vulgar" usage in Quin and we can begin to feel the vitality incumbent upon "repressive desublimation". As the protagonist of *Tripticks* pilots his car which "could hurdle skyscrapers, leap an eighth of a mile" he contemplates his female companion "beautiful as Aphrodite, wise as Athena, swifter than Mercury, stronger than Hercules", before leaving her in the desert and pursuing "Liberty and Independence or Death" (51). Driving into the sunset we are told that "homicide can be fun and we today can build a great cathedral of the spirit" (51). Power, knowledge and the spirit – the arena of the Gods – are not here channelled in the interests of growth or understanding ("sublimation") but in the interests of enjoyment which must forever overcome itself with increasing levels of hyperbole to remain within the ecstatic moment. The Gods aren't lending resonance and meaning to the world as higher powers, they are avatars for a totalising will; no longer imposing the moral law, they become the laws which are beyond good and evil.

The relationships in Quin's novels embody this cruel irony by which a unity of experience between separate subjects makes them more alone, less comprehensible. In *Passages*, the closeness of a couple, once "freed" from the traditions of subject and object in love, becomes a form of shared entity within a solipsistic world of perception. A typical passage is found when they are on a train, the male protagonist writing, "something about getting completely high while mobile, not subjected to one's own mobility. Fantastic dance of images, shapes, forms. Shadows flowing past" (38). The couple is then described as "mediums inhabiting each others' imagination" (39) within the main column, whilst in the left-side column (a graphic device indicating that what is being written is a comment on the main column) he questions "What would it be like to get completely outside our bodies?" and "She likes to think people look upon her as essentially quite mad, almost a prerequisite for any lover she has" (39). The sense of perceptual unity embodied in "getting completely high while mobile" draws the couple together in one movement – inhabiting a shared imagination – whilst in another equal and opposite movement driving them to desire total release into obscurantism; madness and incorporeality. The "traditional" monogamistic couple is structured as a binary whereby each forms the object of the others' desire, yet here the couple is allowed to transcend their exclusivity and satisfy a desire for total immersion. From this point, however, desire can only but move elsewhere – or, in the hypersensual writing of Quin, everywhere. The deferred gratification, or "sublimation", of monogamy is replaced by momentary satisfaction; a "desublimation" which enslaves the subjects ever more overwhelmingly to the pursuit of insatiable desire.

In his work on the logic of consumption in capitalist society, Slavoj Žižek identifies insatiable desire with the systematic overconsumption that defines the contemporary mode of production. He identifies how in psychoanalysis "access to knowledge is... paid with the loss of enjoyment – enjoyment, in its stupidity, is possible only on the basis of certain non-knowledge, ignorance" (*The Sublime Subject of Ideology*, 73). In his lecture on "The Superego and the Act" he presents this form of enjoyment with the example of "caffeine-free diet Coke" in which "we drink Nothingness itself, the pure semblance of a property... The more profit

you have, the more you want, the more you drink Coke, the more you are thirsty, the more you obey the superego command, the more you are guilty". Žižek's Lacanian model and Marcuse's Frankfurt School approach are here mutually supporting in terms of the essential end-point of the "permissive society" and the final trajectory of Quin's narratives. In internalising the repression that constitutes "civilisation" (social responsibility and conscience) we are similarly internalising the (superego) imperative to enjoy. When the superego demands enjoyment it is formulated as a moral good which would then identify the blockages to attaining this good – censorship and obscenity laws – as moral evils. The capitalist system demands overconsumption in order to reproduce itself, and allies permissiveness to its cause, because (once internalised) it is a more effective form of pacification than force and restraint. The desire which is then mobilised, however, loses much of the ideological frippery demanded of sublimation and is reduced to a vague and automatic hunger. This alienated consumption haunts Quin's imagery; sexual intercourse is reduced to "the manoeuvring of... limbs, as though they were assorted feelers searching for a hiding place" (*Berg*, 43 – 44), in one stark example. In many ways, Quin's writing represents one of the fullest explorations of the abjection at the heart of total consumption which is available to us from the Britain of the Sixties. She presents a dark mirror of the "Swinging London" of collective imagination.

The abject, as the lived core of experience dragged onwards by insatiable desire, "takes place [at] a crossing over of the dichotomous categories of Pure and Impure, Prohibition and Sin, Morality and Immorality" (Kristeva, 16). As Julia Kristeva noted in her work on Celine, *Powers of Horror*, abjection brings together fragmented writing under a different rubric to purely linguistic analysis; words appear connected erratically across an existential void, as opposed to being connected by semantic meaning. Such fragments of speech mean that "thanks to them but without stating them, an affect breaks out, in sound and outcry, bordering close on drive and abjection as well as fascination. Bordering on the unnameable" (204). Quin seems to evoke such readings, especially in deeply affective sections such as the "transcriptions" in *Three*. The narrative of *Three* explores the suicide of "S" through S's diary (in which she is written about in the third person) and transcripts from S's tape recordings. The diary presents an external narrative which frames these spoken word passages. That "S" was, by her own account, emotionally erratic, lodged within a complicated triangular relationship and, after writing, killed herself – ties the writing into the "unnameable" of abjection;

Waiting
For that
First faint light. In a darkened room. Hurt me hurt
Me hurt me
There
Here
Anywhere. This way. If you like. Talk to me talk.
Talk
To
Me
Was it like this with
Never before. Not like this. No one has touched me ever
Never never

Like this. Before. Like waves. The coming
Slowly. Dual Roles
Realised. Yes yes
Yes.
Be a boy. If you like. Anything. Be
Just be. (114)

Within this section of writing there recur the uncertain voices critics such as Stevick and Morley have described; spoken mentally or vocally, in past or present, in reality or fantasy, it is intentionally uncertain. The effect upon the graphic surface of seeing this thin strip of words cascading down a large white space is such that they appear to float, detached from the rational bourgeois narrative represented by the “standard” typography of the Leonard and Ruth sections, only to make the impact more severe as the words themselves are read. The abjection of “S” as a subject becomes identified with the blank space of the page upon which requests for contact are stamped. The language, framed by the sexual nature of the narrative, is nevertheless entirely about receiving contact in a wider sense – as if “S” is incapable of her own agency; “hurt me,” “talk to me,” and then just “talk,” “just be”. In the midst of reverie, what begins as a desire for a palpable and defined object becomes a total desire, a desire for “anything”, as it becomes apparent that beyond desire there is now nothing left.

The essentially void-like state of abjection is notably powerless not simply in its vulnerability to outside invasion and influence, but also structurally in its inability to conceive of linear time. Without an internal chronology by which to gauge sublimation of desire into constructive outcomes, the “desublimated” state of abjection cannot but totalise desire as there is only its direct experience within the moment. For Loraine Morley, this state of writing within Quin’s texts exists with “the nebulous hinterland between patriarchal subjectivity and sexual identity, on the one hand, and the abject state of maternal engulfment on the other; the impossible choice between a violent, violating language not [her] own, and silence” (130). The Oedipal situation that maintains bourgeois hegemony is then translated into “Father as language” and “Mother as silence”. Such a conception of the structures of language as a force for domination exists throughout Quin’s works in various ways, although it is only in her unfinished manuscript for *The Unmapped Country* – published in Giles Gordon’s collection, *Beyond the Words*, in 1975 and which “could have been her most considerable work” (“Intro”, 11) – that it becomes a central aspect of the narrative. The novel features Sandra, a patient in a psychiatric ward, who refuses to undertake treatment. The situation is introduced in terms of her refusing to talk in therapy. However, when faced with the psychiatrist “she knew he would continue writing even if she did not say anything. Every gesture noted” (252). Although perhaps less subtle than her other published works, the allegory of “psychiatric hospital as society” nevertheless indicates Quin’s own awareness of issues of power and writing; that subjects are “written” by discourse in spite of themselves.

In spite of Quin’s nuanced usage of style to convey the terror and powerlessness of abjection, however, it is also important to consider her works historically against the backdrop of sexual liberation which informed the “permissive society”. To indicate simply that Quin’s works demonstrate the working of repressive desublimation, often in spite of themselves, is to miss the historical vitality that drove such currents and the often radical deconstruction of “traditional values” (authoritarian ideology) and the power structures they upheld. Returning to the couple in *Passages* that have been seen to exist in an abject state of unity (rather than a binary-

monogamy), the challenge that they present to “traditional” repressive structures could be considered revolutionary (in that it does away with them altogether). Introduced to an orgy sequence, which by this stage of the narrative appears a standard ritual, we are told of an “afternoon spent with naked bodies, sunlight and hashish. She fell in love with her own sensuality” (95). Here the scene has become desublimated; entered into a timeless, boundaryless space of insatiable desire. From this setting we are then introduced to her perspective: “when she saw him make love to another woman she became aware for the first time of his body, as a physical thing” (95). This sexual encounter isn’t framed in reaction to monogamy as a form of protest or “sin”; it is experienced as a process of differentiation against the backdrop of sensual unity. It is a curious re-learning of subjectivity in a world subsumed entirely within one consciousness. As we look to the left-hand column (indicating a comment upon the main text) we can see that this narcissistic process of re-learning the world extends to the transcendental level in the form of the Greek Gods: “Primitive Greek mirrored his own human relations in the figures of his gods”, “The matriarchal goddesses reflect the life of women, not women the life of the goddesses” (95). Against the authoritarian values of monotheistic Christian Britain, Quin’s orgiastic explorations represent a kind of anti-Copernican revolution in consciousness. There are no infallible higher powers around which our lives revolve - it only appears that way from our perspective within our historical conditions. Undermining the authority of “objectivity”, this idea stands as a considerable threat to bourgeois values in their contemporary reification.

5.3: Artaud and Ritual

The particular anti-bourgeois flavour of the Sixties as a cultural myth is heavily tied to notions of anti-rationalist, vitalist, and some would say obscurantist feeling as a more direct means of cultural expression. Such feeling was not limited to radicals and outsiders, but was starting to inform the established cultural industry. Perhaps the most totemic moment of such a shift was the Royal Shakespeare Company’s 1964 “Theatre of Cruelty” season at LAMDA. Jinnie Schiele, in describing the season, finds its origins in the two central figures of Charles Marowitz – who “brought group experiment from America” – and Peter Brook who brought “a sound knowledge of commercial West End theatre” (xii). The resulting season “achieved enormous publicity, both good and bad, and helped kickstart the underground movement of alternative theatre” (xii). Although this “Fringe” theatre would not truly explode as a movement until 1968 and the end of theatre censorship, the acceptance of Antonin Artaud into the ultimate British theatre Establishment, the RSC, is a sure indicator of the prevalence of anti-bourgeois ideas; even if such ideas remained of the modernist avant garde variety. Indeed, an equally demonstrative indicator of how Artaud’s works were being co-opted lies in the fact that his collected essays, *The Theatre and Its Double*, from which the term “Theatre of Cruelty” is derived, did not appear in English translation until John Calder commissioned it for his *Signatures* series in 1970. Upon publication, it very quickly became a “best-seller” and one of Calder’s “most important” printings (Calder, 376). Prior to 1970, Artaud’s rise to popularity could have occurred only among French speakers or those who shared their circles; a distinctly metropolitan trait in Francophobic England.

It can be seen that Antonin Artaud’s appearance as a central influence on the British

theatre of the Sixties erupts from the same “permissive society” as Ann Quin. Artaud calls for the dismantling of the traditional restraints placed upon the theatre in the same radical language; “a kind of horrible poetry is... expressed in bizarre acts, where changes in the facts of life show its intensity undiminished, needing only to be better directed” (4). The revolutionary sense of moving towards a libidinally liberated society is compounded by Artaud’s personal biography which also reflects the concerns of contemporary radical thought – drugs, schizophrenia, the esoteric – with the grace-saving caveat that Artaud himself was safely dead. Artaud’s demand that “there must be a poetry of the senses just as there is for speech,” (26) is as equally relevant to Quin’s hypersensual prose as it is to theatre and, for that matter, to the new ubiquity of television and jarring energies of rock music. The space beyond and between meaning in signifiers, which we earlier identified with the abject, lies at the heart of Artaud’s theatrical project wherein “the thoughts it expresses escape spoken language” (26). Such a project also entails the renunciation and subsequent reclamation of “past masterpieces[;] fit only for the past, they are no good to us” (53). Some, such as Marowitz and his Open Space theatre group, chose the literal interpretation of these words, as described earlier, and presented “Shakespeare ‘cut-ups’” (Schiele, 15) with titles like *A Macbeth*, *An Othello*, and *Variations on the Merchant of Venice*. Others took a less direct approach by incorporating classical deities or characters from the canon into their works, sometimes for ironic purpose yet equally to invoke the Dionysian spirit of “pre-rational” theatre.[31]

The content of Quin’s writings intersects with the Artaud-inspired aesthetic in two directions. Firstly, she can be seen to describe a number of improvisational pieces of theatre within her narratives. Quin herself was theatrically trained and sought a career in theatre before taking up writing – a career cut short by crippling stage fright. In these pieces, the energies Quin sought to exercise on the stage can be found sublimated upon the page. Such pieces, like the memory of “mime plays” (142) in *Three*, carry Artaudian faux-mystical overtones - they wear “white robes...like a priestess – a sort of goddess” (142) – and are libidinally charged. The “rather transparent” robes, worn with “nothing else”, grant “freedom of movement [and] a sense of power” to the actress. The style of writing is that which leads Stevick to conclude that “clothes, in Quin, are always erotic” (235). For Stevick, Quin conjures a perspective where “the world is seen as in a visual composition, often simultaneously heard. And as it is seen and heard, it presses against the musculature of the body, against the nerve ends, and is felt on the skin” (238). It is Quin’s inimitable style that constitutes the other direction of Artaudian movement. Not only does she describe theatrical productions within her narratives, but her narratives themselves instil similar principles and, as such, can reach out and lay this perspective across history. The Greece of *Passages* is constructed between transcendental historical images in such a manner. A total pan-subjective pan-historical view appears in which “veins shifted with shapes” (13). “Tastes of bread, smells of synagogues. Sperm. The drying of that between pyramids, she pressed together,” suggests a certain timeless, sexually-driven mysticism whilst the still-palpable imagery of the Second World War – most clearly the massacres in Crete - creates a landscape from “incinerators”, “guns, engines controlled the screams”, “line of men against the wall, blindfolded, they fell forward” (13). As a means of introducing us to the narrative, Quin is calling on the “thoughts that escape spoken language” in a montage made up of resonant images that nevertheless refuse to resonate with each other in a simple linear manner. In refusing

narrative, history becomes pure affect.

Against the backdrop of a non-linear experience of history we can see a return to ritual, both in Artaud and in Quin's own writings, as a means of imposing transcendental structures without recourse to the ideology of "progression". The multifaceted layering of mythic structures and allusions that fill Quin's novels present a clear challenge to reviewers. Rourke, in attempting to unpack these structures in his review of *Berg*, identifies it as "Freudian, Oedipal, and steeped in Greek tragedy, but also a heady mix of the postmodern, grotesque and the macabre"; the suggestion being that the overall storyline of a son seeking to kill his father is not the simple Freudian reworking that it appears. Rourke's use of "the postmodern" as a means of identifying this uncomfortable appropriation is telling. Other than the first line of the novel – "a man called Berg, who changed his name to Greb, came to a seaside town intending to kill his father" (xv) – there is little character development to help the reader understand Berg's patricidal tendencies. Berg's desire to kill his father is the unchallengeable certainty driving the narrative. From the humanistic psychological tradition, this is the novel refusing to present its internal logic. Once characters are no longer driven by rational imperatives then the unspoken imperatives that are left appear only as embodiments of fate or chance. Such constructions of fate then return to the ritual structures that pre-date rationalism. However, the approach to these rituals has fundamentally changed. In an interview quoted by Mackrell in Evenson and Howard, Quin describes her Catholic school experience as essential to her thinking; "a ritualistic culture that gave me a conscience, a death wish, and a sense of sin. Also a great lust to find out, experience, what evil really was". If we take "evil" as the Manichean movement away from God – in opposition with the "good" movement towards God – then we can see why the framework of ritual and fate would remain unchallenged. If ritual represents the timeless structures of life then an "evil" desire to escape is as structured against its opposite desire; to conform.

We can think of this narratologically. The Oedipal narrative of *Berg* doesn't find resolution in castration, as in Freud, but stages the eternal return of the father figure. The incident framing the first "killing" of the father occurs at a bonfire on Guy Fawkes Night. Berg is positioned across the fire from his father who was "looking vaguely like him, clutching a bottle" (72), when his father's dummy is thrown into the fire by the crowd. This dummy, associated with the father from the first, can be seen to stand for the phallus. Rescuing it from the fire and returning it to his father, Berg then accompanies his father home while deciding that "definitely this time it [the killing] would be accomplished" (74). In rescuing his father's dummy from the tribal crowd, Berg has proven himself superior and usurped the phallus from the father. Between the night and the morning (a chapter break) it is assumed that the killing was "accomplished", with the father's corpse "rolled up in the rug" (75). The continually-thwarted task now is for Berg to hide the body. Throughout his mission he remains unrepentant, arguing that "surely I've served imprisonment long enough, this, now, is my birthright, the after-birth is theirs to cope with, along with the rest of the country's cosy mice in their cages of respectability" (81). The threat is enough, however, that once he has relieved himself of the body he takes an "almost erotic pleasure" (117) in disguising himself as a woman to make his escape. At this point, the father returns and – mistaking him for his former (now Berg's) lover –

ravishes him. We now realise that the “corpse” rolled in the rug was actually the dummy. Taking the dummy as the phallus, Berg can be seen to usurp it from his father and yet, through social guilt, renounce it, which in turn leaves him castrated, feminised and victim to the return of the father. Eventually, Berg appears to accomplish his task again yet, having experienced the return once before, the ambiguity remains and a potential second return is foreseen in “a piece of wood, five foot by seven” (168) in the closing lines. The essential structural metaphor that holds the narrative together is that of the ocean. It is of this ocean that Berg asks “oblivion where are you?” (156), seeing in it a desirable abjection, yet each time he casts in the “killed” father it returns on the tide. Unlike Sophocles’ Oedipus, Berg actively pursues the death of his father – as Quin pursues “evil” – yet the laws that structure society are seen to eternally return regardless of intention. Narratively, the message of *Berg* is the same that we see throughout the “permissive society”, that which is the central defence of the Oz Trial; formal prohibition is redundant in the face of the “natural” limits that society realises for itself. The police never physically appear in *Berg* as the internal logic of the narrative is enough to rectify any transgressions. Here is the logic of repressive desublimation.

3.4: Experimental Theatre; Being and Happening

In considering the writing of Ann Quin in its historical context – relaxed censorship, the “permissive society”, and the explosion of experimental theatre – it is essential to take note of her publisher, John Calder. Described in a fiftieth anniversary festschrift, Paul Harris describes Calder as one of the last “Gentleman Publishers. They may not all have exactly been gentlemen but they were characters... utterly devoted to the call of the struggle into print... all were from a mould now broken” (119). Indeed, the very fact that Quin only found a publisher in Calder locates her at the centre of the debates around censorship and the role of literature as the Calder name, as well as having published the most living nobel prize winners of any publishing house, was at the forefront of this “struggle into print”. As a staunch liberal, John Calder appears to have shared the libertarian beliefs of the Oz editorial team from the beginning, if not their taste; he considering a “civilised man” to be one who is “tolerant, liberal with a small ‘l’, and unshockable” (“The Novel”, 41). His career in publishing began by printing American authors blacklisted in their homeland during McCarthyism. “I sometimes wondered in those days why publishers of crime fiction were not prosecuted for advocating murder” (88), he recalled in his 2001 memoir, *Pursuit*. From this, Calder went on to take over Better Books, a London bookshop, which “before the 60s changed all the rules... was the only London West End bookshop that held readings and literary activities” (Herbert, 127). These readings and “literary activities” would become central to a London literary scene and form a major point of connection between experimental theatre, performance art, poetry and novelists. Calder’s tireless attempts to bring the *nouveau roman* to Britain by publishing translations and hosting visiting writers would lay the foundation for a number of cross-cultural inspirations and friendships – not least introducing William Burroughs to Jean Genet, and Ann Quin to Nathalie Sarraute.

As part of “the Calder Group”, Quin would travel in circles much larger than simply those contracted to John Calder’s publishing companies. In his memoir, Calder recalls how these “other writers not published by me, but who moved in the same circle, included Eva

Figes and B.S. Johnstone [sic]” and he “would sometimes include them with my own writers, especially Eva” (274) when it came to readings and events.[32] A testament to Calder’s genuine enthusiasm can be seen in his willingness to continue booking Figes for readings after she refused him publishing rights to both *Tragedy and Social Evolution* and her bestselling *Patriarchal Attitudes*. By the publication of *Tripticks*, Quin was sharing the celebration of her publishing with Burns’ *Dreamerika!*, to which Johnson was invited (Calder and Boyars, “Invitation”). For experimental writers, it appears that the Calder name and those associated with it were at the centre of the newly emerging anti-Establishment literary life in Britain. The “avant garde” that Calder cultivated received further attention through the many literary events that he held. “There are endless newspaper cuttings from the Sixties and Seventies about the high-voltage literary festivals he organised at Edinburgh and elsewhere,” writes Bill Webb, “including inevitably the ‘happening’ involving the trundling of a naked beauty through the hall in a wheelbarrow” (64). Remembered by Calder as the first “happening” in Britain, this calculated disruption of Calder’s Edinburgh Writer’s Conference in 1962 demonstrates the cultural influences travelling between America, Continental Europe and Britain at the time – at least within experimental circles. Such a series of networks clearly influences the development of Quin’s writing over time; from the Brighton of *Berg*, she then writes of Greece in *Passages* and finally of America in *Tripticks* – her style progressing in each.

In spite of the Calder Group’s considerable influence, however, it would be too limited a view simply to take Ann Quin’s publishing house as the limit-point of her experience as a writer. The young, working class Quin – although clearly producing writing which would validate her presence in the company of the other Calder writers – is nevertheless slightly out of place in such an upper-middle class, largely middle-aged world. Calder’s own understanding and appreciation of Quin’s work is hugely paternalist in tone and, as a result, tends towards a rather one-dimensional stock reading. *Berg*, for example, is described as featuring a father-figure “(really a portrait of the author’s father)” and a conclusion in which “the body of the older man is washed up by the tide, prescient of what, in a short time, would happen to the author herself” (272). It is, however, highly indicative of the new possibilities of the “permissive society” that the opera-loving Calder happily existed in overlapping cultural circles with groups like the revolutionary Yippies and radical theatre experiments such as Jeff Nuttall’s “The People Show”. The situation of Quin, coexisting within both the modernist avant garde and the new radicalism, suggests the unique quality of her work which lies in both its undeniable experimentalism and its unflinching candidness. The philosophy and consciousness of the “permissive society” are seen appearing across realms of culture previously considered separate. Quin’s unique approach to public reading, for example – already described in the opening sections of this thesis – demonstrates considerable countercultural influence;

[She] did her Quin thing, that is to say she came onto the stage and she just sat and looked at people, she wouldn’t say a goddam word! She just stared, she either implied or she actually stated that we sort of ‘think-communicate’, we can communicate more in silence than with someone actually putting the words across: which I was really quite intrigued by... whereas Bryan was simply pissed off (405)

Against the traditional notion of “reading”, it could be seen that Quin was cutting to the abject core of her writing by representing it in silence. The mix of reactions from Burns and Johnson

too suggest the kind of forced-response that could be expected of the contemporary underground theatre movement; react how you will, as long as you react. New forms of expression and an increasing fluidity between different mediums allow radical ideas to circulate at an exponentially growing rate – a concept at the core of the “permissive society” as an idea and evocatively expressed in confrontational theatrical “happenings”.

The growth of “underground theatre”, or “the Fringe” is described in Peter Ansorge’s 1975 book *Disrupting the Spectacle* in terms which, taken in the context of censorship and set against the rise of the Calder Group, position it at the zenith of popular Sixties experimental aesthetic and at the cutting edge of a radical “anti-Establishment” culture. Introducing it with the context of May 1968 in Paris, Ansorge sees Jim Haynes’ “experimental Arts Lab” as “a remarkable shop window on a new theatrical phenomenon – the underground” which “created a nationwide circuit of arts labs, campuses and youth clubs” producing “highly individual wares to young and enthusiastic audiences” (1). The success of such productions led to Arts Council involvement, “however reluctantly”, and “between 1968 and 1973 they played as vital a part in the life of our subsidised theatre as the Royal Court National or the Royal Shakespeare Company” (1). Of this movement, the “characteristic form that experimental theatre took... was that of the ‘happening’”, according to Schiele; “this type of event, often interrupting another, challenged an audience’s preconceptions about the nature of theatre. The audience was provoked into playing a positive role” (194). Jeff Nuttall, one of the leading proponents of “happenings” with his troupe, *The People Show*, described the type of agitational, interactive theatre as lying between “demonstration [and] personal therapy. Frequently a savagery that began as satire... changed midway to sadistic participation on the part of the artist” (129). The boundaries of theatre were opening up into lived space and, as a result, moving from a performance to an event.

The underlying principle of the “underground theatre” movement, from Ansorge’s perspective, lay in the development of Artaudian concepts along directly radical lines. The “body as a supersensitive instrument of expression” was aligned with Marcuse-inspired demands for a non-repressive culture by framing “the text” – that being written language – as “a disguised tool of repression” (26). For Quin, who “before becoming a writer... aspired to work in the theatre” but failed her audition for RADA by having “such nerves that she couldn’t go through with it” (Gordon, “Reading...”), such a movement would present a definite source of inspiration. Such “happenings” and the “arts labs” that birthed them regularly occurred between readings at Calder’s Better Books, presenting a shared context for the Calder Group and the underground to trade influences.

By drawing on Quin’s early theatrical aspirations in a more direct manner, we can begin to see reflections of a developing non-verbal theatre framing much of her writing. Other than *Berg* which draws on an inversion of Oedipus for its narrative, it has been often commented upon by critics and reviewers that Quin’s novels lack a distinct narrative line. The manner in which this is usually approached tends towards ideas of impressionism or else a formal experiment in opposition to the novelistic tradition. Once these elements are considered matters of style (as was done earlier) then a closer inspection of narrative framing indicates distinct character relationships in the manner of a small-cast play. *Three* stands as the clearest example here. The narrative is experienced through Quin’s immersive, abject style, as it is framed between the three characters of Ruth, Leonard

and “S”. The situation at times results in an inauthentic bourgeois performance, such as when the characters sit at the dinner table and are “fussed at as a child with new dolls, [Ruth] making sure each of us sat in appropriate places” whilst Leonard “dedicated himself to the moment, person, subject” (57). At other times, especially during the tape-transcript sections, the situation is evoked with increasing abstraction; at one point even geometrically: “three points *A B* and *C* on a rigid body in a straight line... variations endless” (21). The ability for an abject style to invert or else render arbitrary the usually ideologically conservative functioning of narrative would invite us to draw direct parallels between Quin’s novels and the experimental practice of the underground theatre. Both move from staged performance to direct experience and, in doing so, both seek to undermine the reproduction of repressive forms of life.

As well as a shared context and aesthetic-ideological effect, experimental theatre and “happenings” can be implied as having an increasingly influential effect upon Quin’s writing, most especially as she is adopting American culture in *Tripticks*. As well as descriptions of “New Age” approaches to culture such as “the workshops [where] our aim is to stop the cortical chatter and open the flow of existence. Lose your mind, and come to your senses” (165), Quin’s flights into imagery and metaphor take a notable turn towards the subject matter of the underground. In a section beginning with the Burroughsian image of “an unutterable tacky gaggle of bathos-laden drag queens at an impoverished homemade ball” (127), Quin (in the guise of her male, private-eye protagonist) goes on to describe how “homosexuality, heterosexuality and asexuality all merge into one broad spoof of religious sentiment... an unprecedented freedom, but a freedom only to switch channels: AC/DC”. This is followed by a “sketch” (to use the comic theatre term) about the moon landings; “two earthlings representing both sexes (though they are men) all races (though they are pinkish-white beneath their space suits) and all nations (though they are from the United States)... How far, after all, is the moon from earth? Precisely the same distance as Vietnam” (127). Quin’s voice becomes notably different in *Tripticks* and takes of the trappings of the American counterculture in the same manner as many British Fringe troupes and a large amount of the British underground press. The culture of the “happening” can be seen to move from Debord’s framing of a “situationist” culture in which “the suppression and the realisation of art are inseparable aspects of a single supersession of art” (191), through the American formulations evoked in Jerry Rubin’s vision of “millions of young people [surging] into the streets of every city, dancing, singing, smoking pot, fucking in the streets, tripping, burning draft cards, stopping traffic” (253) and resulting in a revolutionary image of the “permissive society” as the ultimate expression of countercultural rebellion. In many ways the latent influences of theatre and abjection that run through Quin’s writing find their fullest expression in American alienation. The liberating force of such expression, however, can also be read as undermining much of the essential “Britishness” of Quin’s writing. Such a stylistic shift demonstrates a possible future trajectory of Quin’s writing into a Kathy Acker-esque writing of grotesquery and postmodern excess, although the return to more traditional form in “The Unmapped Country” – her final unfinished novel – might suggest otherwise.[33]

John Calder describes one of Quin’s last American journeys – that one which resulted in *Tripticks* – as part of an overall chaotic pattern which, at least from his

vantage point in 2001, represents the sort of limits to which his permissive liberalism could be pushed. Funded by a D.H. Lawrence Fellowship, and then the Harkness Commonwealth Fellowship, Quin journeyed America spending “much time with hippies, was drinking too much and had experimented with a number of drugs” (272). From Calder’s perspective this journey marked the beginning of the end. Winning “an Arts Council grant of £2,000”, Quin flew to Dublin, then Amsterdam, “and no more was heard of her until, in mid-winter, she was rescued, half-frozen from a snow-drift in Stockholm” (272). The lithium treatment which attempted to restore her health left her unable to write, manic-depressive and essentially posed the main chemical factor in her suicide. Quin’s story, presented by Calder as a “wasted talent” parable about the dangers of drugs and hippies, fits neatly into the popular mythical narrative of the “permissive society”; working class person makes good, creates great art, goes too far and dies. The imposition of this kind of retrospective narrative, however, fails to do justice to the kinds of contextual intersections which present the American situation as a form of solution to the concerns addressed throughout Quin’s prior work. The kind of hyperconsumption that Quin engages in on her American journey seems to symbolise the way many undercurrents of the “permissive society” were recuperated by late capitalism.

Looking at Quin’s letters from the time, the “experimenting with drugs” Calder describes can be seen to function as a shortcut to the kind of saturated, abject perspective so indicative of her style;

I’m finding in the last oh what six months perhaps that I seem to be living within a closed form, and wanting v. much an open one: that total attention and being receptive that I learned on that peyote trip last year – that ‘magic’ just don’t seem there anymore, and I know damn well the more I force it the more it disappears. How to regain that, that kind of awareness, that kind of centre? Maybe I need another peyote trip? Aie aie! Maybe living in London doesn’t contribute to that, it is a very ‘closed in’ place to live. (letter to Larry Goodell)

The performative bourgeois social structures which the “permissive society” marks out as repressive, and “happenings” aim to disrupt, is here totalised into a “closed in” state of being which peyote collapses through the psychedelic experience of hyper-receptiveness. Rather than a situationist “supersession of art”, however, chemically altered states lack a social element and, as a consumable commodity, entail the insatiability of desire that Marcuse identifies with the post-authoritarian mode of repression. The poverty of expression associated with the vocabulary of the drug scene – “closed” or “open”, “magic” – demonstrates an attempt to communicate the Artuadian meaning between the words but, as a similar feeling can be conveyed through consuming a commodity, the necessity for accuracy no longer exists.[34]

The pure receptivity of the psychedelic experience equates not only to consumption on the chemical and material levels, but also on the level of signification. As an extension of perception, the drugged space is a non-literary environment; it favours the direct sensation over the act of interpretation. The abject subject is made malleable by perpetual consumption. It is perhaps for this reason that Quin reports that “diversions seem mainly the movies, and well they are good, but become a drag when one wants to really move into/out of oneself” (letter). The language of the cinema and the comic strip overtakes Quin’s writing in *Tripticks*. From the pulp-genre image of the private eye that meets the reader on the first page with stock film-noir lines – “I have many names. Many

faces.” – to his road-trip journey following “my No. 1 X-wife and her schoolboy gigolo” (7), the narrative is a pastiche of commercial genres from pop culture mediums. The language too expresses such influences; “there I was feeling fat and happy in the middle of the road and then blap whamp whamp whomp sok thud whak zapp whock thud bam zowie I got pushed on all sides” (66). Just as the theatrical form was challenged through experimental theatre and happenings in the 1960s and appearing in Quin’s writing like *Three*, we now have the language of cinema and the visual, moving image, adopted by comics ending up in Quin’s early 1970s novels. The difference in application, however, is considerable. Where theatre forms a living element of Quin’s overall narrative structure, the language of the image is adopted as pastiche. The postmodern approach which celebrates using “someone else’s words” if they are used in a different manner to their original intention poses, for the first time in Quin’s writing, a level of distance from what appears on the page. As the novel closes we are presented with the image of “earth moving out into the world. I opened my mouth, but no words. Only the words of others I saw, like ads, texts, psalms, from those who had attempted to persuade me into their systems” (192). The experimental striving towards a direct experience of life finds its apotheosis in the total immersion of the cinema screen. Where stylistically, the desublimated being was conveyed by embedding the entire situation with consciousness, crossing subjectivities, the mass communications of *Tripticks* incorporate the subject in the global language of Hollywood media. Before Baudrillard, Quin demonstrates the mystical qualities of late capitalist hyperrealism yet, in an even more prescient manoeuvre, she identifies the historical genesis of hyperreal Being not in mainstream media but in the immersive, ecstatic imperative of the counterculture.

In terms of the trajectory of Ann Quin as a writer, *Tripticks* can on first glance appear out of place – after three increasingly poetic, fragmented studies of abjection, an American postmodern novel – yet in terms of the trajectory of the “permissive society” (and the mythical “Sixties” in general) it is suitably fitting. *Dreamerika!*, the Alan Burns novel *Tripticks* shared a publication-date party with, also looks to the U.S. as a symbol of a hegemonic culture recuperating previously revolutionary ideas. Like Alan Burns or Christine Brooke-Rose, it may have been that Ann Quin would take a break from writing and return years later as a fully-fledged postmodernist. However, it will be B.S. Johnson that remains the writer with whom she is most often connected when she is written about, if only because the two committed suicide within a month of each other. For Jonathan Coe, “Quin – like [Johnson] – refused to ‘live by illusion’. Better to end your life altogether than to live it dishonestly” (372). A fellow working class writer working on experimental novels, Quin represents a certain proletarian authenticity if considered as a close compatriot of B.S. Johnson. Calder too compared them – wanting to ration Quin’s grant money as a wage, just as Johnson wished for himself – as he considered that, regarding both of their suicides, “the Arts Council must be considered at least partly responsible for” (276). For paternalistic Calder, the two represent a beautiful yet flawed experiment when, for a brief moment in post-war Britain, working class people were at the absolute cutting edge of high art. The suggestion is that, taken better care of, both would have continued writing experimental novels unabated. With the economic prosperity of the Sixties collapsing about them, however, and taking with it the foundations upon which such experimental writing was built, any such a “movement” would undoubtedly share the fate of the “permissive society”; its commercially saleable assets stripped and the

revolutionary ideals quashed by a backlash. In a way the suicides of Ann Quin and B.S. Johnson present a dramatic full-stop at the end of this unique period of British literary history, although to ascribe anything more to them than simply an unhappy accident of timing would be to overstate a case. Standing alone, Quin's four novels represent some of the most revolutionary writing of the Sixties, simultaneously evocative of the experimental atmosphere of the period and of on-going relevance for writing today.

Chapter 6: "Disembodied Voiceless Logos": Recuperating the Radical in Christine Brooke-Rose

6.1: Critical Understanding of Christine Brooke-Rose

For the past twenty years in British literary criticism Christine Brooke-Rose has come to be "widely recognised as one of Britain's most innovative contemporary writers" (2); that quotation coming from Sarah Birch's 1994 monograph *Christine Brooke-Rose and Contemporary Fiction* – a book which itself has inspired many interesting recent analyses. Like the other experimental writers covered in this study, however, Brooke-Rose has a tendency to defy the imposed critical categories through which non-traditional novels are engaged. The most commonly applied category is perhaps that of the "postmodern"; a term embraced by Brooke-Rose herself during her later novels and thus seemingly validated and projected back upon her earlier works. Unlike the other writers covered here, Brooke-Rose also had a considerable career in criticism and her knowledge of theory informs her fictions. Perhaps because of her theoretical iconoclasm the small-but-growing area of Brooke-Rose studies tends away from contextual analysis.

As a writer of literary fiction, criticism and non-fiction about literary fiction, Brooke-Rose automatically occupies an uncomfortable space for the academic. Theory, having pretences to some form of universality, is ostensibly positioned as objective, whilst novels are engaged with as productions of writers, eras, cultures, or traditions depending

on the critic's (theoretical) approach. To conduct thorough research the Brooke-Rose scholar must inevitably relate her theory to her novels – a certain “difficulty” that Richard Martin describes in terms of “the inevitable gap between intention and reception” (43). As a result, the qualities of theory and text become entangled and a certain return to the author-as-meaning occurs, albeit somewhat ironically through Brooke-Rose's poststructuralism. A similar uncertainty is visible in the way in which critics engage with B.S. Johnson's notion of “truth” yet, as Glyn White writes, “Johnson makes a conspicuous target and perhaps it is not surprising that hostile critics prefer to attack the perceived experimentalist position in the person or work of Johnson [as] Brooke-Rose and her novels are much more elusive” (*Reading the Graphic Surface*, 121). To understand the works of Brooke-Rose demands a confidence and theoretical nuance in works intimidating both for their complexity and exclusivity.

Brooke-Rose's attitudes to her own work vary throughout her long career with only a handful of disparate elements remaining constant. In her collected “last essays”, *Invisible Author*, she complains that she is “always called a cerebral writer, which is rather strange, because in most of my novels I'm inside somebody or other and invent as I go, just registering what they see, hear, smell, taste, feel, and sometimes its physical, sometimes not, according to the character” (172). Her confidence is placed in a certain attitude to mimesis that justifies experimentalism as more “real” than realism. It is perhaps for this reason that her four earliest novels (*The Languages of Love*, *The Sycamore Tree*, *The Dear Deceit*, and *The Middlemen*) are largely disowned after the publication of her first experimental novel, *Out*, and their titles eventually disappear from her bio together: she introduces herself in 1991's *Stories, Theories and Things* as “author of *Out*, *Such*, and earlier novels” (6) whilst Carcanet's 2006 *Omnibus* covers them under her job description as “a freelance reviewer and writer during the 1950s and 1960s” (1). During her career as a writer she is constantly committed to formal experiment in a way that Figs, Brophy, Burns and the other surviving writers were not, even to the point of embracing the title “experimental” (Boswell).

In terms of titles, she writes of herself in *Stories, Theories and Things* as someone who “has a knack of somehow escaping most would-be canonic networks”; going on to list the half-stuck labels of “*nouveau roman* in English, *nouveau nouveau*... Postmodern... Experimental... included in the SF Encyclopaedia... automatically coming under Women Writers (British, Contemporary) [and] sometimes of interest to the feminists”, whilst all along she is “fairly regularly omitted from the ‘canonic’ surveys... that come under these or indeed other labels” (4). To the extent that she is addressed critically, it would seem that attempts to engage with Brooke-Rose on any terms but her own have been doomed to fall short of a final categorisation that would have allowed her to reside within a secure and recognised critical “canon”. Indeed, there is a sense that the most successful labels applied to her have performed the opposite function. In an interview with Friedman and Fuchs she describes how the label “*nouveau roman* in English” tends to be used as “from the English point of view [the idea] is safely dead and no one talks about it anymore. In other words, all one is capable of as a woman is to do what the men do, and not so well” (29). Brooke-Rose recognises that she is doubly-cursed by being experimental and a woman writer within Britain's conservative literary culture. The defenders of Brooke-Rose's writing invariably study her as an individual

writer exiled from the larger critical consensus.

In what sense then, can Brooke-Rose be characterised by the title of “experimental”? In the review of her career with Friedman and Fuchs she is directly faced with the term and responds in a fashion suggestive of the definition taken in this thesis. The “experiment is really not knowing where you’re going and discovering”, she writes, suggesting a sense of progression without necessarily any theoretical approach as a guide. Equally whilst “experimenting with language, experimenting with form and discovering things... sometimes you might get it wrong and it just doesn’t come off” (31). As with Johnson, there is an admission of potential failure present within the concept of “experiment”, yet no more so than the average writing – the importance of the task lies more in “discovering things”, uncovering and revealing new and more potent forms for the contemporary novel to take.

In spite of similarities in approach, however, Brooke-Rose critically remains a distinct entity to Johnson. In a very late interview for the *Independent on Sunday*, she herself goes as far as suggesting that Johnson “was not an experimental writer. His stories belong to the then fashionable drab social realism” (Boncza-Tomaszenki, 28). Admittedly, this response may be due to exasperation with a life-long comparison between her work and Johnson’s often made by the non-academic press without particular nuance. It does, however, mark out the boundary lines by which Brooke-Rose can be measured against other experimental writers and measure them equally in return. The clear distaste Brooke-Rose has for social realism – most notably the “drab” world it seeks to portray – is reflected in many of the critical attitudes surrounding her work; most especially later reviews written after the popularisation of postmodernism and the kind of text-about-text that Brooke-Rose is later known for. Judy Little describes Brooke-Rose’s experimentalism in terms of “someone who explores language itself (rather than sociological or psychological issues)” (122); an approach that makes her texts resemble “appositional amalgamations or constellations” that are “not open readily to a reading that searches for opposition and difference” (130). Unlike Johnson, whose texts are more and more often read as reflections of the post-war era through an experimental lens, Brooke-Rose is almost universally treated as a pure embodiment of the experimental lens itself. It is this fantasy of the absolutely self-sustaining text free of cultural influences (outside of the fact that it renders them insignificant) that, fairly or unfairly, comes to define Brooke-Rose’s work.

However, by taking this ideological construction not as a self-perpetuating metanarrative about language and discourse but engaging with it as a product of the historical intellectual climate we can reopen a route into Brooke-Rose’s works that the theoretical implications of the works themselves would seem to close. In all accounts of Brooke-Rose’s life, for instance, the central emphasis is placed upon her cross-continental origins and subsequent “outsider” status in both France and Britain. From this theoretical points are made, such as Reyes’ description of her bearing “a continually shifting and very individual relationship to the cultural contexts in which she works” (58). The strength of this truism lies in its defence of Christine Brooke-Rose as a writer of considerable independent merit, yet it also closes down much discussion of context and influence. Indeed, outside of reducing Brooke-Rose to “the *nouveau roman* in English”, a translator of a foreign culture, there is assumed to remain only the position of the pure original free of all influence but their own genius. In reality, Brooke-

Rose belonged both to the literary press in London, having regular columns in both *The Guardian* and *The Spectator*, and later was part of academic circles in Paris thanks to her Professorship at the University of Paris VIII, Vincennes. Although she was often uncomfortable within these circles and consciously placed herself on the margins, the aspect of influence and context cannot simply be ignored.

Clearly evident in Brooke-Rose's work, novelistically, academically and journalistically, is the influence of the *nouveau roman*: described by Nadeau as "the refusal of certain novel forms – [psychological, action] – and their replacement by a narrative that was concerned less with the conventions of genres than the particular reality demanding expression" (127). Yet within the "particular reality" that British reviewers such as Anthony Burgess wrote – his articles in *The Yorkshire Post* regularly singing the praises of British experimental writing – the works of Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute carry none of the "connotations of protest, the breaking down of worn images, the flying of violent flags", but rather seem "in favour of stasis rather than dynamism, death instead of life" ("Characters in Orbit", 4). Sandwiched between the "elitist experimentalism of modernism, and the foreignness of the *nouveau roman*" (Tew, 38), it would be inaccurate to position Brooke-Rose's work, or that of any British experimental novelist, as instead caught between a conservative British literary culture and a critically involved French one. Brooke-Rose wrote for a British audience and received awards for doing so; to attribute this to her capacity to predict that poststructuralist theory would become the dominant theoretical framework of postmodernism's material conditions would be as overly generous an analysis as "*nouveau roman* in English" is a reductive one.

In short, many of the positions which surround Brooke-Rose's work critically can be demonstrated in Brian McHale's postmodernist analysis of her works in the collection *Utterly Other Discourse*. Taking the chronological and stylistic breaks between *The Middlemen* and *Out*, and *Thru* and *Amalgamemnon*, McHale posits "two, and now perhaps three, distinct careers as a novelist" (195).[35] The period constituting *Out*, *Such*, *Between*, and *Thru* marks the beginning of her "hesitancy" and, therefore, her postmodernism; something that only truly flowers in the novels after *Amalgamemnon*. Regardless of whether the writing of such daring experimental fiction without precedent in Britain could be called "hesitant", McHale's real critical fallacy is the attribution of later postmodernism to earlier experimentalism: essentially suggesting that the four novels Brooke-Rose wrote between 1964 and 1975 existed without meaning until later critical engagements were made possible. Operatively, this is a theory-first model of analysis conducted more for the benefit of McHale's notions about postmodernism than a real attempt to explain a text.

In approaching Brooke-Rose I intend to answer McHale's categorisations by considering the "second career" of four novels as "experimental", to be differentiated from the later "postmodern" novels by merit of both their historical positioning as texts and the cultural context within which they appeared. The "postmodern" Brooke-Rose who can all-too-knowingly write in 1981's *Rhetoric of The Unreal*, "that this century is undergoing a reality crisis has become a banality, easily and pragmatically shrugged off" (3), is in truth a product of developments materially and ideologically within twentieth-century Europe that would be better thought of as one result of the earlier period's potential, rather than a fatalist's explanation of a radicalism that now appears "naïve". It is my contention that this state of

affairs was brought about in line with a much larger cultural trend – the recuperation of the radical theories of May '68 into neoliberal late capitalism. Such a perspective draws upon an increasingly popular cultural materialist reading of the cultural phenomenon known as “postmodernism”, yet it is through a concentration upon the historical details of Brooke-Rose’s own experiences that the divide between her Sixties novels and her later works appears.

6.2: May '68 and the Postmodern

In his recent publication, *The Communist Hypothesis*, Alain Badiou begins his analysis of the contemporary situation in the West with a stark message that “the real outcome and the real hero of '68 is unfettered neo-liberal capitalism” (44). As an active thinker during that revolutionary moment who continues to sing its praises he is clearly not speaking lightly when he says that “the libertarian ideas of '68, the transformation of the way we live, the individualism and the taste for *joissance* have become a reality thanks to post-modern capitalism and its garish world of all sorts of consumerism” (44). Arguably this may be a veteran “'68er” overstating the relevance of the protests, yet this type of reasoning is not unique to Parisian thinkers. Indeed, the relationship between late capitalist modes of production and the theoretical traditions that became known as post-structuralism and postmodernism has become a topic of keen interest to many contemporary thinkers, Marxist or otherwise.

Much of this thought stems from Jameson’s work *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* and its linking of “forms of transnational business... new international division of labour... new forms of media interrelationship, computers and automation” with what he describes as “familiar social consequences, including the crisis of traditional labour, the emergence of yuppies, and gentrification on a now global scale” (xix). The argument proceeds from the new theoretical models of resistance popularised in the Sixties, widely categorised as opposition to overarching power structures based around questions of identity and micro-politics, to a comparison with a neoliberal mode of capitalism that equally desires the demise of traditional power structures. The neoliberal model, however, acts not in the interests of freeing the subject from bondage but rather frees capital from political regulation. The logical conclusion of this argument is a critique of postmodernism and its related aesthetics that sees in its self-referentiality and distrust of metanarratives a complicity with the individualism that represents neoliberalism’s dominant ideological discourse. Slavoj Žižek dramatizes the argument during his study of Deleuze in a short vignette wherein a yuppie reads Deleuze’s *What is Philosophy?*, making enthusiastic comparisons of “the communication of affective intensities” with the adverts he designs, the “direct coupling [of] man to a machine” with his son’s Transformer toys and “the need to reinvent oneself permanently, opening oneself up to a multitude of desires” (183) with online virtual pornography. It is not a particularly convincing scene, yet behind the exaggeration lies a persuasive linking of poststructuralist radicalism and modern consumerism.

Other variants upon the direct comparison between postmodernism and late capitalism have been made. For example, Simon Choat's study of *Marx Through Post-Structuralism* emphasises a distinction between theoretical poststructuralism and "postmodernism in general" wherein "the post-structuralists did not succumb to the widespread anti-Marxism of the post-1968 years" (17); essentially keeping them distinct from the characteristics perceived in an overarching postmodern trend. Similarly, Raymond Williams' later essays designate "avant-garde political positions... dissident from fixed bourgeois forms, but still as bourgeois dissidents" (62) as a category equally existent within modernism and pre-twentieth century cultural formations; suggesting that the "'68" phenomenon is in no way unique in terms of appropriated radicalism. These variants upon the overarching narrative seek to define certain aspects of "genuinely radical" avant-gardism against a faux radicalism complicit with hegemonic ideology. From this we could assume that certain texts will forever resist absorption whilst others were either written naively, deceptively, or in some other state of bad faith.

Against these arguments over decontextualised texts it would perhaps be better to regard questions of radicalism in terms of particular cultural climates. If we assume Jameson's description of neo-liberalism – transnational capitalism premised on technological advancements – to be at least a useful approximation of what "postmodernity" entails, then arguably the historical premises of this argument post-date the conception of many of Brooke-Rose's experimental novels. Certainly it can be argued that texts predating "postmodernity" contain typically "postmodern" aspects, maybe even that these kernels direct the cultural climate towards what becomes "postmodernism", yet it would be somewhat revisionist to then position these texts in direct equivalence with later, consciously postmodern works. Theoretically, the process follows the Situationist idea of recuperation: as Guy Debord states, "dissatisfaction itself [becomes] a commodity as soon as economic abundance could extend to the processing of such raw materials" (59). The texts are "recuperated" into a canon *a posteriori* in order for them to be sufficiently explained and reconciled with what Debord labelled the "spectacle", but could equally be labelled hegemonic culture, or critical consensus.

If poststructuralism's recuperation into late capitalism through neoliberal ideology is the theoretical process by which "postmodernism" results from "May '68", then such a process ought to be reflected in the historical evidence also. Kristin Ross' 2002 *May '68 and its Afterlives*, argues that "the management of May's memory – the way in which the political dimensions of the event have been, for the most part, dissolved or dissipated by commentary and interpretations – is now... at the centre of the historical problem of 1968 itself" (1). In attempting to outline a historical picture of what occurred during that fateful month and the years following, Ross highlights the fact that even as it was occurring, every aspect involved consciously sought to define the situation in their own terms. "May '68" as a term, she points out, erases the memory of the Algerian war and the Parisian massacres of the early Sixties conducted by fascist paramilitaries and police which served to radicalise many of those involved in the late Sixties insurrection. Without this historical context, the "events" were typically described by the left as a spontaneous unity of radical student and striking worker – a unity that it was the objective of the Gaullist regime to break by denying its existence;

The overall aim Pompidou would sum up in a single sentence: 'I wanted to treat the problem of the youth separately'. After students had been dissociated from strikers each group would settle back into the confines of their 'sociological' identity, and both would

lose (69).

The definition of the situation was a fundamental part of the politics of the situation, one which involved both sides with the media and its implied audience, the citizens of France, the battleground. Arthur Marwick, in his account which attempts to dismiss political statements altogether, reaches similar conclusions to Ross, albeit emphasising that the unity was largely due to the police tendency to unleash equally excessive violence against both students and striking workers (606). In such a situation, where the public was daily exposed to the visceral excesses of police and gendarmes on the news, outspoken support for the state would itself be a form of extremist political gesture. The stage was effectively set for poststructuralism's political obsession with communication and image.

In my paper "The Composition of Christine Brooke-Rose's *Thru: An Afterlife of May '68*" (2014) I outline Brooke-Rose's entrance into the Paris turmoil in the latter months of 1968 in order to take up a position in the newly formed University of Paris VIII at Vincennes. Although an "experimental" university with a faculty dominated by Communists and Gauchistes, the institution was nevertheless formed as part of the Gaullist project of addressing students' demands separately from the workers and, as a result, the institution was not only politically volatile in terms of its own student base but the campus also served as a regular target for outside far-left groups' campaigns of disruption and occupation. Long after the events of May '68, Vincennes would continue to be a hotbed of political radicalism – part of the process Ross describes in terms of "traces of May's thematics [continuing] to be played out.... above all in those pursuits that engaged directly with the question of representation" (114). The linguistic fixation upon "representation" – a homonym referring both to democratic political organisation and to the mimetic intention of communication – would allow the debates of May to enter academia where the financial support for extended political discussions arguably created an echo chamber effect, artificially prolonging revolutionary insights long after the revolutionary moment itself had passed. Looking back on her experiences of Parisian intellectual culture from 1976, Brooke-Rose describes the prominence of "language being analysed in Marxist terms of exchange and subversion, so that Sollers could tell me recently, with absolute conviction, that 'nous avons *fait* le revolution' [we have *made* the revolution]" ("Ganging Up", 26).

Brooke-Rose's first years at Vincennes did not find her quite so blasé, however. After a decade championing the experimental novel in a dismissive Britain, the seriousness and vitality involved in French intellectual debate was a constant source of anxiety. Early drafts of her anti-biography, *Remake* (in its initial incarnation as an actual autobiography prior to libel-conscious editing), describe "the very first meeting I attended, just before the University opened, [which] went on from ten in the morning to eight, and I had never heard University teachers being so rude to each other" (235). Her response was to adopt a militantly apolitical stance, refusing to become involved on the grounds of her non-French nationality. Alongside the composition of *Thru*, she also worked on what would become *A ZBC of Ezra Pound*; a study of Pound's work, largely the Cantos, which, as Barbara Hardy describes, is "brilliantly analytic and empathetic, profoundly as well as superficially close to the experience of Pound in its structures and languages". That the majority of Brooke-Rose's work and correspondence at this time (held at the Harry Ransom Centre)

involves Pound rather than her other theoretical work or the writing of *Thru* suggests a certain willingness to escape contemporary politics by delving into the esoteric.^[36] By 1973, her attitude to the popular poststructuralists, by this point selling out any auditorium they chose to speak in, was a suspicion that “it is all a beautiful, theoretical game, that they themselves don’t perhaps believe in, but indulge in it as one indulges a passion”, labelling the various systems as “the Levi-Strauss Palace, the Derrida Daedalus, the Lacan Labyrinth, the Kristeva Construct, the Barthes Pavilion, the Planetarium showing the Sollers System” (“Viewpoint”, 614). The Vincennes years mark Brooke-Rose’s introduction to the then-radical discourses of poststructuralism, yet they also result in the disillusion, detachment, and irony which later define postmodernism. Although not politically radical herself, Brooke-Rose’s personal history places her in relation to the process of recuperation as sketched by Badiou, Jameson, et al.

If this is the process by which Brooke-Rose is historically positioned to make her own valuable contributions to both the theory and the literature of postmodernism, it must be asked what existed prior to that stage, during the years she spent as an experimental novelist in Britain. Brooke-Rose’s later statements concerning “experimental” writing often engage with the term under the fuzzy rubric we have seen employed in the introduction by studies such as *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, complaining that “although I was of course labelled ‘experimental’ without further detail, my topics were seldom signalled as original” (*Invisible Author*, 16) since “experimental” is considered to be its own genre. In her contribution to Friedman and Fuchs’ *Breaking the Sequence: Women’s Experimental Fiction*, “Illiterations”, she suggests that there might be “trivial as well as truly innovative experiment just as there can be trivial as well as important writing in wholly familiar forms” (62). Uniquely among the other writers covered in this study, however, Brooke-Rose celebrated the term “experimental” during the Sixties whilst it was still largely a negative, marginalising term. In an interview with *The Scotsman* following the publication of her first non-traditional novel, she said that “I prefer to call my novel, *Out*, experimental” in preference to the offered term “anti-novel” (Boswell). Although Brooke-Rose’s preference for “experimental” may be partly due to an aversion to being known as a writer of “the *nouveau roman* in English”, a study of her statements and journalistic work demonstrate a far more conscious framing of “experimental”. For Brooke-Rose, the term is intentional rather than merely adopted and emerges from a distinct set of parameters.

Brooke-Rose’s framing of the term “experimental” shows itself most clearly in her championing of the *nouveau roman*, although it in many ways pre-exists it. Her discovery of the new style emerging from France could be dated to 1961 when she reports upon a talk by the visiting trio of Marguerite Duras, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute which “caused quite a tremor of excitement in literary circles”. For Brooke-Rose, desirous to break away from the “too easy” social satires she was currently writing, they represented an attempt “to save the novel from its ‘representational’ impasse” (“Vanishing Author”). By 1965, Brooke-Rose has herself engaged with this “representational impasse” in the form of *Out* and, in writing again of the *nouveau roman* in an essay for *London Magazine* entitled “Dynamic Gradient”, outlines her framing of the problem as essentially scientific in nature,

We must evolve a new way of thinking and reject the old universalistic and absolute concepts, especially our habit of identification, just as the scientists have done. If we do not, we shall continue to produce more and more semantic blockages in our nervous

systems, more breakdowns in communication, more mental disturbances, in fact we would not be equipped to survive the evolutionary process. (1)

This is a long way from the later Brooke-Rose who is content to see innovation occurring in “wholly familiar forms”, the Brooke-Rose of the Sixties considers radical new engagements with form to be absolutely necessary “experiments” in “evolving a language that corresponds structurally to what we know of empirical reality today. Not yesterday. Not tomorrow” (5).

The imperative to revolutionise communication and perception through the novel form is, according to a 1969 essay entitled “The Nouveau Roman”, tied directly to “the revolution in physics, the breakthrough to a non-Aristotelian, non-Euclidean way of thinking, which has indirectly affected semantics, philosophy and the arts. Only the novel lags behind”. To truly come to terms with the counter-intuitive yet physically verifiable theories of general relativity and quantum mechanics, the old mechanistic presumptions of the Nineteenth Century Novel had to be reconsidered and new forms developed in line with contemporary experience – a process which deservedly wears the title of “experimental literature”. As a result, the mechanistic cause and effect of standard narrative structure is challenged, stable characters exploded and the language composing the text overflows the traditional barriers of style, content and form which were developed in line with the Victorian’s empiricist project.

In pursuing this experimental, “scientific” project, Brooke-Rose engaged in considerable research in psychology for *Out* and, for *Such*, filled a notebook with her studies of up-to-date astronomical, cosmological and other physics-related research. The underlying drive towards absolute contemporaneity and its assumed relevance to the individual can be felt in the questions she asked and the intuitions that inspired them. For example, three whole pages of notes involve the physics behind moon landings and the associated Space Race. Not only does she note the “cosmic ray particles” which pose a barrier to space travel, she also notes that because “most of the electron spectrum [is] blocked atm” by the atmosphere’s shielding function, the future of telescopes involves orbital satellites – a speculation which leads on to a series of notes on Sputnik, correcting calculations due to relativity and a series of technical terms many of which make their way in to *Such* itself. Not only contemporary in terms of science-related current events, Brooke-Rose’s notes on cosmology begin to wander into a postmodernist questioning of historical linearity (“appeal to cosmol. Theory – inquiry as to extent to [which] past and future are predicted”), metanarratives (“[do] present conceptions of physical laws have nothing to say? pass from physics to metaphysics, from astrology to theology”) and the sovereignty of the individual (“corporate views of science merge into beliefs of individual”). By remaining true to her scientific approach, however, Brooke-Rose works to understand the nuanced answers to such questions and moves beyond the obscurantism which plagued later popular-postmodernist discourse. As a result, *Such* incorporates conceptions of relativity into its “experimental” development of multi-perspective characters and battling discourses in a nuanced and complex manner.

That Brooke-Rose’s commitment to novelistic revolution through scientific understanding eventually ebbed towards the end of the Sixties is no doubt in part due to the general misunderstandings and indifference to her project; one reviewer suggesting that “few of us except – or perhaps especially? – psychiatrists or physicists could write it and fewer still could

read it" (Cosh). Nevertheless, the terms under which she framed "experimental" as a positive label remain and, arguably, ease her transition into the French environment of poststructuralism. A review of Levi-Strauss' work in *The Times* on the 2nd March 1968, for example, she gave the subtitle "A New Multi-Dimensional Way of Thinking". Similarly, a book-length study of the *nouveau roman* involving her conception of a "post-Euclidean" writing was only abandoned due to concerns summarised in a letter from Eva Hesse; "what percentage of them will still be heard of in ten or fifteen years from now?". Brooke-Rose's theoretical and literary desire for experimental literature to push forward into the revolutionary world of the "Now" is what simultaneously connects her to the other British experimental writers seeking to bring literature out from under the shadow of the Nineteenth Century Novel and represents the very energies which could be usefully recuperated into the backward-facing self-referentiality of postmodernism. Surrounded by the often incomprehensible political commitments abounding in Vincennes, Brooke-Rose's commitment to experimenting with the novel form would benefit from adopting a sense of irony in a manner that would not be possible in the stark political reality of Seventies Britain. This Brooke-Rose transcends the label of Sixties British Experimental Novelist, but that is not to say that during those years she was not caught in the same radical currents as her experimental contemporaries.

6.3: The Experimental Novels of Brooke-Rose

Returning to Christine Brooke-Rose's four experimental novels – *Out*, *Such*, *Between*, and *Thru* – it is clear that we must now view them not in McHale's "proto-postmodern" context but, if we are to consider the later works recuperating earlier ideas, they should more correctly be considered as a trajectory of British experimental writing in the Sixties. The ideas developed within the novels and the modes of formal innovation chosen to convey these ideas follow a logic of their own which remains distinct from the arguments imposed upon them at a later stage by, among others, the author herself. This is not to say, however, that this distinction is so stark as to isolate these novels from each other; rather it allows us to more clearly distinguish the evolution of Christine Brooke-Rose's style on its own terms whilst also helping to draw connections between Brooke-Rose and her contemporaries which have not been entirely apparent using the current academic approach. A short chronological review of these novels is therefore appropriate.

As described above, the network of geneses that inspires Brooke-Rose to move from the style of social satire present in *The Middlemen* to the formal innovation of *Out* can be linked together through her work in the publishing industry. Literary journalism, criticism and the mode of academic discourse entering the early Sixties become for her exhausted and with them her own writing; she later dismisses her early novels as indistinguishable from the other social satires of the period, totally lacking in any sense of personal intellectual ownership. The Friedman and Fuchs interview sees her describing them as "too easy. It was great fun, but it wasn't what I wanted" (30). Inspired by her introduction to the *nouveau romanciers*, and with the benefit of a move away from Secker and Warburg into the more promising hands of Michael Joseph, Brooke-Rose was in a position to undertake her move to experimental writing. By 1964, Christine Brooke-Rose was in a position to produce *Out*, the first of what would become her recognised canon; demonstrating many of the techniques that would come to define the Brooke-Rose voice whilst breaking with the "easy" satirical form almost totally.

The most initially palpable shift that takes place between the satirical and the experimental styles is the role of narrative in contextualising the action of the novel. Like many other of the experimental novels – most obviously works by Alan Burns and Eva Figes – the traditional “narrative”, in terms of an overarching context or story, is largely only alluded to in the text; the overt description of the novel as a “science-fiction vision of a world surviving catastrophe” is saved for the blurb.[37] This exclusion of overt storytelling from the text stems from the naturalistic connection of all language and description to character. For an example of the dramatic shift in style that writing embedded in character creates, consider the first paragraph of *Out*:

A fly straddles another fly on the faded denim stretched over the knee. Sooner or later, the knee will have to make a move, but now it is immobilised by the two flies, the lower of which is so still that it seems dead. The fly on top is on the contrary quite agitated, jerking tremendously, then convulsively, putting out its left foreleg to whip, or maybe to stroke some sort of reaction out of the fly beneath, which, however, remains so still that it seems dead. A microscope might perhaps reveal animal ecstasy in its innumerable eyes, but only to the human mind behind the microscope, and besides, the fetching and rigging up of a microscope, if one were available, would interrupt the flies. Sooner or later some such interruption will be inevitable; there will be an itch to scratch or a nervous movement to make or even a bladder to go and empty. But now there is only immobility. The fly on top is now perfectly still also. Sooner or later some interruption will be necessary, a bowl of gruel to be eaten, for instance, or a conversation to undergo. Sooner or later a bowl of gruel will be brought, unless perhaps it has already been brought, and the time has come to go and get rid of it, in which case – (11/12).

As a technical innovation, Brooke-Rose has here attempted to altogether remove the distancing involved in narratorial free indirect discourse: something she later described as a “subtle device for narrative information [that really] blurs and weakens it, exposing it as a ‘mere’ device” and identifies it as being “instinctively” dropped by the *nouveau roman* “without the flourish with which Robbe-Grillet disowned the past tense as *the* mark of traditional narrative” (“Dissolution”, 189). Inspired by, and yet distinct from, the style of the *nouveau roman*, Brooke-Rose’s commitment to presenting narrative only through character shuns a sense of novelistic objectivism and the dictatorial qualities associated with the authorial voice, even when it contains within the character a commitment to thinking in the objective, the third-person. *Out* becomes a patchwork of characters centring around a narrator whose own fixations shape the narrative and thus our understanding of the character simultaneously.

The situation presented in the novel through the allusive style is in keeping with Brooke-Rose’s desire to create a modern scientific novel both in form and content, albeit in a fairly literal sense by drawing upon the conventions of the science-fiction genre. A post-apocalyptic world premised on contemporary ecological fears – plague, natural disaster – gives voice to both tensions about race – “colourless” people are now the servants of characters like “Mrs. Mgulu” and “Mr. Swaminathan”, with slogans such as “exalting all colours to the detriment of none” (125) representing the ideology of this new hegemonic power – whilst scientific terms are transformed in the head of the former-scientist protagonist into obsessive compulsions to be repeated to the point of meaninglessness. The “Labour Exchange” that provides the setting for large parts of the novel positions

these ideological discourses against the inhuman engines of government bureaucracy. The driving force of the novel is largely how these tensions surface in the character-centric descriptions of this fictional world. In a sense, the language “games” taking place within this novel are merely indicators of shifted power relations; power relations that, in the classic science-fiction tradition, are indicative as much of contemporary society as the imagined world presented.[38]

The world that Brooke-Rose portrays through her characters is therefore one of fantasy significantly different from the approach of the *nouveau romanciers* that she asserts provide her inspiration. In Maurice Nadeau’s 1967 study of *The French Novel Since the War* the innovation of the French approach focuses upon “a scrupulously drawn up inventory of what is perceived by our senses, of the world that exists outside us: the pure world of the object, the world of the ‘thing-in-itself’” (129). In *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, Brooke-Rose can be seen to share this sense of the “thing-in-itself” being imperative as “objects or elements in nature that stand for, or become points of convergence for human emotions, are strictly a form of pathetic fallacy” (294) and so removing any qualities inherently invested in such objects can be seen as a “cleansing operation”. Certainly the stylistic implications of non-emotive description are present within *Out* from the opening line where “a fly straddles another fly on the faded denim stretched over the knee” (11). However, where the theoretical readings of this style focus upon notions such as authenticity or objectivity – “thing-in-itself” a clear reference to Heideggerian ontology – the situations that the character-led descriptions portray are such that the lack of emotive connection becomes itself a central focus of character. The novelistic urge towards creating a purer form of mimesis doesn’t find its end here in formal innovations but in the questions such innovations raise about the effects that characters’ world-views have upon their position within that world. The passive observer of fly copulation, unemployed and awaiting gruel to eat, ruminates on what “a microscope might perhaps reveal” (11) in a foreshadowing of the increasing solipsism he will experience as part of a racially and economically alienated people.

Similarly, the linguistic shift towards technical language in *Out* – scientific, bureaucratic, and otherwise – moves away from the dinner-party familiarity of *The Middlemen* towards an impression of scientific objectivity and modernity. Yet this change in register is not only a stylistic switch from satirical novel to experimental novel, but also functions to bring a polyphony of discourses into the novel, all with conflicting hierarchies. In *The Middlemen* the invasion of public relations jargon into a dinner party is presented as highly gauche and the technicalities of estate agents and property law exist only as an infuriating hindrance to the main characters’ bourgeois sense of their entitlement to own property. For the satirical Brooke-Rose all forms of language not associated with the “people like us” who are writing, reading and appearing in her novel are presented as inferior, invasive and corrupt. The experimental framework of *Out* places language central to the interaction of its characters and, as such, their position within the society is presented in the very linguistic construction of their consciousness.

A key phrase of *Out* that recurs numerous times through the main character’s narration is that “a [scientific measurement device] might perhaps reveal [a potential element of something being contemplated]”. From the first page where a “microscope

might perhaps reveal animal ecstasy” (11) the phrase is repeated with teinoscopes, bronchoscopes, periscopes, and others for both comic effect and to reinforce the alienation of the speaker. A similarly recurring phrase, “diagnosis always prognosticates aetiology”, is used to conjure the medical hierarchy that the speaker, as a potentially plague-carrying “colourless”, is both studied and denigrated by. Interestingly, Brooke-Rose doesn’t relate this technique to the *nouveau roman* but rather to her other major modern influence, Ezra Pound. The “subliminal structures” of repetition apparent when “you use the same phrase in a new context” (Brooke-Rose, Cohen and Hayman, 3) both change the phrase and the context. The language does not remain independent, as such, but takes its meaning from the context; the accumulation of such contexts that occurs during repetition invoking new reactions and implications. Application of the same over-technical phrase in a different context can thus conjure both bathos and sympathetic responses simultaneously.

It is the transference of language and meaning between contexts that distinguishes *Out* as an experimental, rather than postmodern novel. The exploration of terminology and fantasy worlds inverts contemporary social structures in a nuanced manner indicative of Brooke-Rose’s concerns about power and its ideological justification. Gone are the privileged speakers of the satirical novels and their narrative preference afforded by free indirect discourse, yet the eye for character and the social interactions that constitute it remain and are perhaps enhanced by the formal innovations. Rather than the impersonal sparring of discourses that comes to define much of Brooke-Rose’s later works, the development of language is here absolutely related to character and, as a result, becomes a mark of belonging or alienation. Moving on from *Out*, *Such* moves further with this interrelationship of character and language into conjuring an entirely internal world replete with its own sub-characterisations and emotional resonances.

The story of *Such*, again most clearly visible through the blurb, is that of “a three-minute heart massage”. Around this moment of death and resurrection memories of the narrator’s life as a psychiatrist to theoretical physicists - whose work makes them “tend to edge on the brink of madness” (257) – are intercut with a fantasy world, or “unfinished unfinishable story”, featuring six imaginary children, “Dippermouth, Gut Bucket Blues, my sweet Potato Head, Tin Roof, Really [and] Something” (390). The inclusion of scientists allows Brooke-Rose to again include technical language, yet unlike *Out* the technical language, taken from in-depth research, is not used here as an exclusive discourse but as a means of evoking increasingly metaphorical imagery regarding psychological states. From the “kind of space” (224) the character’s mind moved through in death, to the “psychotic handwriting of distant nebulae...beyond the visual range” (224) and the “weird geometry of human nature” (256), *Such* collapses distinctions between the counter-intuitive complexities of modern scientific understanding and the human mind that seeks to understand. The repeated phrase “physician, heal thyself” (269) – as well as the speaker’s self-description as “Mister Lazarus” (223) – draw out with Biblical themes a metaphysical sense of unity between cosmology and psychology whilst simultaneously implying the “psychotic” qualities of such ruminations in the excessively metaphorical nature of the language.

Set against the “real-life” characters of the protagonist’s memory (whose presence is

intertwined with technical metaphors) is the fantasy space. Where the cheating wife, respectable academic patriarch, and wearying journalists could be considered part of the stock of archetypal characters that inhabit British “literary” fiction, the menagerie that the protagonist meets in the fantasy space evokes pop-genres; the “girl-spy” (235), “white monk” (289), the “cigar shaped vehicle” (214) that “travels supersonic” (216) – all combine and move between the “children” characters in a pastiche of comics, Carrollian nonsense, and pulp sci-fi. Writing in 1986 about “The Dissolution of Character in the Novel”, Brooke-Rose describes how “round characters seem to have vanished back into fact, into news clips and documentaries, retaining all their real-life opacity” (191). It is clear from *Such*’s roster of characters that much of this scepticism about fiction’s ability to present full personalities is present here as the roles assumed come secondary to the narrative. The comment that the novel seems to make on this phenomenon, however, is not so much concerning fiction as a medium but the nature of personality and the mind. The confusion of the “real” world with its indeterminable metaphor and inconsistent characters leads the protagonist into the realm of fantasy where a commitment to logical consistency is no longer demanded.

The role of the “unfinished, unfinishable story” in *Such* – in terms of both narrative form and the personal consciousness that the novel seeks to portray – is to provide a liminal space wherein the confusion of scientific imagery, personal relationships, and professional knowledge can be dissipated as, distinct from notions such as truth and authority, the “fantasy” narrative of the self can safely work itself out without repercussion. In *Stories, Theories, and Things*, Brooke-Rose describes the difference between experimental literature and “Nineteenth Century Realism” in terms of modern literature no longer holding the assumption that “a determinable world, pre-existent, external to the fiction and governed by coherent rules... can be materially transcribed, objectively... and presented as probable according to experience” (208). In *Such* the central structuring principle of the main character is the fantasy world through which his confusions can be worked out. The message is not that all can be reducible to narrative but that narrative holds a key ordering role that cannot be replaced by, and should not be confused with, empirically observable and testable data. Where the languages of *Out* reinforced systems of domination and alienation, *Such* roots these languages into the core of the subject. We may be one step closer to the discourse-infatuated Brooke-Rose of later texts, but here there remains a central organising principle of the self; one that is perhaps her closest attempt at reaching a literature for the “post-Euclidean” quantum-mechanical age.

The next novel in the experimental quartet, 1968’s *Between*, marks the point at which a recognisable Brooke-Rose style begins to emerge from the ideas being developed, although in both conception and consummation there remain distinct differences when compared to the likes of *Amalgamemnon*. The novel, with “no plot worth speaking of”, according to Richard Martin, “confronts the reader with a series of repetitious monologues... that are uttered between plane journeys, international congresses, and tourist excursions, in cosmopolitan hotel rooms, and airports” (44). This narrative, perhaps “not worth speaking of” as a structuring principle, represents a development from the world-duality of *Such* in that the “real” space has become equally liminal here. The life of the intercontinental translator is presented as simultaneously heterogeneous

in its accumulated knowledge of custom, history and language, whilst overall forming a transnational homogenous mass of temporary locations.

The removal of quotation marks in favour of dashes – a stylistic innovation first introduced in *Out* – becomes in this novel a central means of conveying the confusion of many identities and nameless encounters. Where context made clear who was speaking even in the fantasy scenes of *Such*, Brooke-Rose introduces the speakerless voice in this novel; perhaps an unidentified interlocutor, perhaps internal monologue or memorised voice. The question of “Who Speaks?” so central to *Thru* and largely made redundant in the pure textuality of *Amalgamemnon*, is here a valid question and a great cause of tension when it is considered as a structuring factor of a central character forever moving between unconnected contexts. The development of what might be called “discourse” in a Foucauldian manner – institutionally exclusive means of structuring knowledge and consolidating power – has moved beyond the satirical phase of *Out* where jargon was presented hyperbolically, past the psychological phase of *Such* where it took on metaphysical qualities through metaphor, and into a new structural phase where identity is both formed and annulled in a maelstrom of competing signifiers. The tension is no longer between an internal language and an external, but simply the difficulties of communication under all languages.

The extension of Brooke-Rose’s linguistic experimentation to the inclusion of other languages is central not only to the construction of this novel about translation, but to the questions of the Self and privileged discourses that we have seen developed in the previous two novels. In an interview with Cohen and Hayman, Brooke-Rose describes her “obligation” to use different languages in terms of “when you see a Greek truck with the word ‘metaphor’, which of course means transport, and it strikes you in one way... this, too, is the fusion of discourses” (7). This fusion, central to Brooke-Rose’s wordplay – “Something gets across. Criss-cross. Crease-crasse? God, verr god.” (421) – has the dual effect of making strange both the foreign language and the mother tongue; on a question of “why you have so many consonants together in Polish”, for example, the “habit of the eye”, as reading is described, is forced to reassess the London address of “KNIGHTSBRIDGE” and consider the “GHTSBR, very terrorising. Also, KN, DG, ten consonants three vowels” (481). The alienating effect created by foreign language intrusion upon the speaker’s own thought patterns and languages’ use is emphasised in the constant tendency to reduce nationalities – in terms of both people and objects – into stereotypes and groupings; the necessity being the translator’s need to keep the “words flowing into the ear through headphones in French and down at once out of the mouth into the attached mouthpiece in simultaneous German” (398). The identity between languages becomes necessarily empty – the best translator being invisible in the communication process. The “fusion of discourses” that both the protagonist and to a lesser extent Brooke-Rose herself attempt to create in *Between* consists of a total concentration on form; the detrimental effect that this has upon substance remaining a constant undertone as “the body floats” (395) through scenes.

In a review of Birch’s study of Brooke-Rose, Flora Alexander describes her analysis of the Sixties novels as a turn to “metaphor as a structuring principle, [exploring] processes by which identity is constructed through language” (631). In the study itself, Birch is far more aware of the complexities of Brooke-Rose’s view of “metaphor” – incorporating her study, *A Grammar of Metaphor*, to excellent effect. However, it is in Alexander’s summary of this argument that the prejudice in favour of formal analysis that we saw above is most visible. The concept

of identity “constructed through language” certainly becomes a central theme in both Brooke-Rose’s later works and her theory, yet even the most heavily language-led novel of the Sixties, *Between*, seems to carry an almost opposite message: that language can never truly serve identity, and that a core of being will forever be exempt from communication. In this sense, the formal “metaphor” – the transportation of meaning between discourses through structure – embodies a failure of communication, a patch rather than a bridge. Rather than revelling in language, the protagonist of *Between* describes sex as “circumstances that need no simultaneous interpreting by the codes of zones” (421), despairs of structural anthropologists seeking “the structure of the imagination itself... to whose heart did one do that?” (468), and readily admits that “one has to understand immediately because the thing understood slips away, together with the need to understand” (468). There is an inner core to *Between*’s protagonist that the act of communicating in language does violence to; the body, the imagination, the “thing-in-itself”, are made secondary by language, categorised and devitalised. The religious imagery that opens and closes the novel – “between the enormous wings the body floats” (575) – highlight the transcendent quality of the subject, yet, again, this image is a metaphor, and one drawn from the monotony of aeroplane transport. Tensions arise in the contemplation of this space between discourses – the space that, by transporting language over, metaphor can never truly reach. It is this vitalism, or perhaps nostalgia for a stable Enlightenment subject, that is one of the central targets for the poststructuralist project – the radical element of which Brooke-Rose would meet head-on in the year of *Between*’s publishing.

Following an uncomfortable start at Vincennes in 1968, a gradual acclimatisation and then another moment of confusion and disillusion in 1974 (Darlington), the noise and chaos of Brooke-Rose’s Paris experiences eventually find themselves playing out in a textual war of discourses in 1975’s *Thru*. Here, however, there equally emerges a kind of “pure text” that avoids the implied centre of *Between*’s protagonist. It is a novel without distinct levels – the narrative of a creative writing class simultaneously writing and being written not even appearing in the blurb – but is rather a multifarious construct of voices, intertexts and technical language. Notably, the technical language here is that of contemporary literary theory, Brooke-Rose’s own specialism, suggesting that the mantle of “privileged discourse” framed in the earlier experimental novels is something she now feels complicit in. In “You Are Here...”, Glyn White identifies this as a possible reading of the novel; attempting to “resolve the tensions between being a writer of fiction and becoming deeply involved with narratology as a teacher” (612).

In terms of critical engagements, *Thru* appears to be a central text within the Brooke-Rose canon and, as such, has drawn a number of readings that, whilst not being directly contradictory, at least point to some of the central contradictions present within the style of textual analysis favoured when engaging Brooke-Rose’s work. White, for example, identifies the “whole point of *Thru* [being] that narrative and language, the dialogue between text and reader, are inherently stronger and more essential than criticism” (“You are Here”..., 626). Brooke-Rose herself identified this essential quality in her 1996 lecture “Remaking” as present in-itself within the text, its language presenting “almost naïve mimetism of how we act and speak and think at the same time, without telling ourselves who we are” (4). Meanwhile, making a comparison with *Amalgamemnon*, Jean-

Jacques Lecercle says the text “communicates in the highest sense of the term”, allowing us access to the purest form of reception available now that “we are no longer capable of listening to wretched wandering savages” (169). From a text that privileges the reader, to a text that privileges the speaker, to a text that privileges speech – *Thru*’s highly complex internal structures clearly capture an aspect of communication unavailable in the majority of texts; a kind of limit-point from the excesses of which we can induce meaningful conclusions about language in general.

In terms of the specific intervention that setting this novel against May ’68 offers, what then does this “pure language” contain within it that might demonstrate why the subject disappears between *Between* and *Thru*? A central aspect of the decentred narrative can immediately be found in the conflict of discourses which, unlike earlier texts, here appears not as ways to reach conclusions reinforcing power structures but rather as part of the university system the point of which, education, inherently holds no conclusions but equally reinforces a hierarchy of knowledge. On page 618 (of the Carcanet *Omnibus*) there appears a treble clef constructed out of letters reading “revolution”, followed by intertwining circles of letters that make phrases such as “cruel nails”, “down with strikes”, “capitalistic”, “democratic”, and “the student body” . That this is introduced by an interchange between a political and an anti-political voice ending with “in this text everyone has a voice”, means that this section can both capture the “*prise de la parole*” spirit that Badiou celebrates whilst reflecting upon the circular, self-enclosed nature of such discourses within the academic context. The Brooke-Rose overwhelmed by dogmatic arguments and the Brooke-Rose tired by the theoretical “games” come together in this image of sound and fury signifying nothing, going around in circles.

Similarly, *Thru* contains a number of attacks on women’s liberation, suggesting that feminist discourse may be at best a superficial rebranding of traditional patriarchal university practices and at worst a threat to competency and standards. “Larissa” at one point complains of the “quite abberant” practice of allowing first year students to study “Black Protest of Women’s Lib” as “the Women’s Lib lot don’t understand a thing about deep structures” (635). The practice is said to be “turning this place into a carnival” – the answer to which is that “it’s a mode of perception as Bakhtin has shown” (635), according to the male respondent. Equally, “one finds the very same intellectuals who talk of revolution and endorse black and womens’ lib having as mistresses young teachers of graduate students who slave willingly” (636) – a relationship subtly accentuated in the timetable on page 599 featuring “The Inscription of Protest: Black Literature” taught by “Prof. Littlebrown” and “The Inscription of Protest: Women’s Lib” taught by “Ms. Littlebrown-Fitzjohn”. The “Ms.” implying the lack of sufficient qualifications to be known as “Dr.” and the hyphenated surname suggesting that this has been remedied by the imposition of the superior “Prof.” – albeit a superior with a diminutive nomenclature. Indeed, in a later interview with Friedman and Fuchs, Brook-Rose lamented that she was “a bit of an anti-feminist in those days in the early 1970s”; although it is arguable that this anti-feminism within the novel forms part of the larger questioning of academic discourses that forms its core and as such is only one instance of implied hypocrisies undermining a network of axioms.

The conclusion of the novel suggests a similar state of hypocrisy implicit within literary studies itself. Following a long list of “students” being marked for their creative writing efforts –

these students including “Sade, Marquis de”, “Sand, George”, “Moses”, “Doyle, Conan” (740), and the like – there is, amongst a jumble of letters readable in a number of directions, the description of literary studies as “learning to be a parasite upon a text nobody reads passed on from generation to generation” as the readership “dwindles to a structured elite more or less textivore” (741). The image is one of a total renunciation of the possibilities that May ’68 saw for university education; the “canon” will remain, only changing as the different contributors are “marked” by new academics and placed accordingly, all the while a “structured elite” will dominate these discourses being, as they are, beyond the consideration of earthly satiation and fed only on text. The image is practically Swiftian and certainly suggests that if there is a consistent “core” to this text it is no longer a subject but rather a satirical target with a history going back to Rabelais.

So how does this satirical attitude impact the novel as a “pure text”? The directness of the communication in *Thru* no doubt relates largely to the self-referential attitude imbued in the narrative’s construction. Although there is no B.S. Johnson-esque author figure visibly manipulating the text, there is nevertheless a cavalier attitude to “round characters” and their construction. The two returning voices of the novel, “Armel Santores” and “Larissa Toren”, are demonstrated to be anagrammatical “except for ME in hers and I in his” (647) – the same page swiftly moving into an intertextual appearance from “Jacques” of Diderot’s subtly self-reflexive *Jacques the Fatalist* as if to confirm the reader’s intuition that an author is making their presence felt here. Equally, an attempt at a romantic scene collapses as “the castle seemed momentarily to be French. And yet you have drunk Slovene wine and referred to the count as a latin lover type” (693) – another voice then entering to suggest that “perhaps you had better set the scene in Mexico” (694), which in turn provokes an argument regarding a suitable geographical location for castles, counts and latin lovers to all be present simultaneously. The pulp-romance genre qualities of the scene imply that such an empirical discussion is perhaps an unsuitable response; the reader(s) are intended to suspend their critical faculties in a similar manner as they must when taking “Armel” and “Larissa” to be distinct entities rather than the creation of an author. In a sense, then, *Thru*’s satirical target is equally the people reading as the anonymous hypocrite academics caricatured in its discourses. What this moment in Brooke-Rose’s career suggests, then, is that much of the implicit importance of innovation – the sense of potential central to the experimental approach – has been replaced by a cynicism that is nevertheless humorous and ludic. Exhaustion is overcome by joviality; something that, once met with misreadings on publication, it is easy to suppose would lead Brooke-Rose’s retreat into criticism that followed. All the feelings of disillusion that Brooke-Rose displays on the few occasions that she looks back to her early years at Vincennes in *Remake* are already visibly present in *Thru* alongside the lingering enthusiasm that ends up sublimated into theory.

What is not present in *Thru*, however, at least to the extent to which it is later projected back into it, is any Baudrillardian/Lyotardian denial of the existence of truths. This “high postmodernist” attitude, one earlier identified as occurring in relation to a historical moment occurring much later than either the writing or the publication of *Thru*, and explicitly denied in Brooke-Rose’s Sixties cosmology notes, certainly makes appearances in later texts, and it is for this reason that it is so commonly identified in this novel; a text that is in many ways a blueprint for those texts. Backwards projection is a habit that Brooke-Rose may be conscious of – the title of *Remake* suggests such

awareness – but this nevertheless doesn't stop her from implying that her postmodernism can be predated to her code-breaking work in the war when she stopped reading the papers "out of fear of being unable to distinguish inside from outside information [and thus] to be sure everything known is secret" (108). Needless to say, it would be a dubious academic argument to find the genesis of *Thru* in Bletchley Park, but I would argue that there are similar dangers in recuperating the text as a proponent of later postmodernisms when its origins lie more firmly in the late (Long) Sixties radical atmosphere and its subsequent disillusion.

Ann Jefferson, in her 1980 monograph *The Nouveau Roman and the Poetics of Fiction* writes that "there are two different kinds of interpretation concerning the nature and relevance of [the genre's new conception of] formal realism"; one by which formal innovation "mirrors the organisation of the society in which it is produced" and "another which assumes that it mirrors the structure and patterns of human consciousness" (3). As we have seen, when considering the experimental period of Brooke-Rose such an argument presents a false dichotomy. The very task of relating human consciousness and the form of the novel through which this mimesis takes place is directly related to the organisation of society and the ideological discourses through which it perpetuates itself. For Brooke-Rose, in an essay contributing to the collection *Reconstructing Individualism*, "the society that the novel was developed to study and depict has lost all solid basis, stability, and belief in itself" and as a result "our vision of it has broken up into fragments" (189). The reconfiguration of the novel in order to account for this new fragmentary reality may have at its core an impulse to individuation but, for a writer as structurally minded as Brooke-Rose, the neglect of social organisation would be the first step towards failure. The recuperated postmodern vision of absolute detachment does considerable violence to the meaning of these texts when it is retrospectively applied to them. Hopefully, positioning these novels historically will help to salvage the novels where they have become submerged in the sea of text.

Thesis Conclusion

By reading the five experimental writers addressed in this thesis against their historical context we not only open new routes into understanding each, but also trace a critically neglected line of potential development within the history of British literature. The experimental novelists of the Long Sixties present a distinctly British approach to innovation against a prevailing conservatism. Such approaches are clearly distinct and at times opposite to the combination of continental philosophy and detached irony which came to prominence within Western literary culture in the 1980s. A shared “experimental” identity is instead mapped through notions of commitment, both to social concerns and to the importance (or, more rightly, the perceived necessity) of formal innovation.

Returning to the group of “experimental” novelists after addressing each writer’s contributions individually it can be seen how each writer emphasises an aspect of a shared culture. B.S. Johnson’s anxieties about his class identity are rooted in the shifting social structures of the Sixties, and illuminate not only the experience of writers of a similar class position, like Ann Quin, but all those subject to such social upheaval. Eva Figes’ wartime experiences may have surpassed most in terms of the personal trauma involved, but her writing exposes the shared traumas rooted in British culture twenty years after the end of the world conflict. Politically, Figes reacts against this memory, looking forward to some future moment of liberation from both the militaristic patriarchal society of the past and the lingering spectres of an ancestral patriarchal memory. The experimental novelists’ assault upon old forms and structures is most pronounced in the work of Alan Burns. In his cut-ups we see how far an experimental novelist can break with established tradition while still remaining firmly cemented within their sociocultural moment; undermining complacency while presenting alternative materialist practices. Ann Quin pushes out the boundaries of form beyond the page and into life itself; transversing mediums and consciousnesses on a route towards an experimental mode of Being in its fullest sense. The outlier of the grouping, Christine Brooke-Rose, also points us towards an experimental break with Victorian form. Her commitment to revolutionising the novel that it might approach an already-scientifically-revolutionised contemporary experience presents its own valuable contribution to British experimentalism while also demonstrating how such a trajectory could eventually lead to the postmodern. Each writer benefits from the experiments of the others, and only together does some immanent meaning become palpable within their collective work. As much as each writer had their own vision of the novel’s future, together these visions express a collective striving towards innovation, a sincerity of purpose, and a faith in the power of cultural forms to change the world. To the cynical postmodern eye such a project could not possibly last, but for a short while in the Long Sixties it drove the work of not only one, but a group of British writers.

In taking this cultural formation as a legitimate literary grouping – the argument for which has been the overarching project of this thesis – we can then look to how this grouping differs from other academically-acknowledged “groups” of writers. The key differentiating factors are twofold. Firstly, these writers may pose the only dominant literary avant garde in modern British history without a membership the majority of which were educated in elite institutions. Secondly, the shared conception of the novel as a physical object capable of altering readers’ thought-patterns represents a materialist politics of aesthetics underappreciated by current literary scholarship. Both aspects no doubt contribute to the critical undervaluing of these writers by their contemporaneous literary Establishment and subsequent theoretically-guided reassessments of the canon. Yet where these traits have historically been a weakness, through a thorough and sympathetic analysis of these writers in context these aspects can be framed as their core strengths. It is the task of academic recovery to uncover alternative cultural trajectories lost to

competing histories. These writers offer an example of an avant garde that is not traditionally “elite”, two factors which are so often synonymous in British culture. Outside of this Establishment, their innovations could break so far with recognised critical traditions that only now, fifty years later, has a critical language emerged sufficient to unpack conceptually their contributions to literature.

It is my hope that the new research presented in this thesis furthers understanding of British experimental literature and addresses many of the historical imbalances involved in discussions of “experimentalism”. As reading technologies advance and the presence of the book is again a subject of critical debate, it may be that the experiments of fifty years ago can be seen as of vital importance once more. In conducting new experiments, writers will do well to heed the message which each of these Sixties writers sought to convey in their projects, as different as they were from each other in practice; that form is political, and something that must be taken seriously if it is to effect change. Similarly, as academics begin to give these writers long due critical attention as distinct authors, the insight we gain into each individual deepens and broadens our understanding of the collective just as the collective is only ever realised in the individual.

Works Cited

Abercrombie, Nigel J. Letter to Zulfikar Ghose, 25th October, 1967. Held in Harry Ransom Centre.

Abrams, Philip. “Radio and Television”. *Discrimination and Popular Culture*. Denys Thompson, ed. London: Penguin 1965.

- Ainscow, Faye. Letter to Eva Figes, 1st January, 1971. Held in British Library.
- Alexander, Flora. "Review: *Christine Brooke-Rose and Contemporary Fiction* by Sarah Birch". *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 47, No. 188 (Nov, 1996). Oxford UP.
- Aldgate, Anthony. *Censorship and the Permissive Society*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001.
- Anon. "New Novels". *The Rochdale Observer*. 13th February, 1965.
- Ansorge, Peter. *Disrupting the Spectacle: Five Years of Experimental and Fringe Theatre in Britain*. London: Pitman, 1975.
- Artaud, Antonin. *The Theatre and its Double*. Victor Corti, trans. London: Oneworld Classics, 2011.
- Atack, Margaret. *May 68 in French Fiction and Film: Rethinking Society, Rethinking Representation*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999.
- Badiou, Alain. *The Communist Hypothesis*. David Macey and Steve Corcoran, trans. London: Verso, 2010.
- Barry, Joseph. "Burroughs After Lunch". *Burroughs Live: 1960 – 1997*. Sylvere Lotringer, ed. New York: Semiotext(e), 2001.
- Bartlett, C.J. *A History of Postwar Britain 1945-1975*. London: Longman, 1977.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Memories of Class: The Pre-History and After-Life of Class*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982.
- Birch, Sarah. *Christine Brook-Rose and Contemporary Fiction*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002.
- Boncza-Tomaszewski, Tom and Christine Brooke-Rose. "The Texterminator". *The Independent on Sunday*, 27th March, 2005.
- Bond, Robert. "Pentonville Modernism: Fate and Resentment in *Albert Angelo*". *Re Reading B.S. Johnson*. Philip Tew and Glyn White, eds. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Booth, Francis. *Amongst Those Left: The British Experimental Novel 1940 – 1980*. Lulu, 2012.

- Boswell. "Writer Out on a Limb". *The Scotsman*. 17th August, 1965.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Richard Nice, trans. London: Routledge, 2010.
- Bowring, Finn. "Repressive Desublimation and Consumer Culture: Reevaluating Herbert Marcuse". *New Formations No 75*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2012.
- Boyars, Marion. Letter to Jim Smith Esq. 25th November, 1970. Held in Lilly Library.
- Bradbury, Malcolm. "Putting in the Person: Character and Abstraction in Current Writing and Painting". *The Contemporary English Novel*. Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer, eds. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980.
- Bray, Joe, Alison Gibbons and Brian McHale. "Introduction". *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*. Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons and Brian McHale, eds. London; Routledge, 2012.
- Breakwell, Ian. "Fine Cut: Alan Burns' Collage Prose". *Review of Contemporary Fiction No. 17 (2) 1997*.
- Brooke-Rose, Christine. *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981.
- . "BBC Radio Play". Draft notebook. Held in Harry Ransom Centre.
- . "Claude Levi-Strauss: A New Multi-Dimensional Way of Thinking". *The Times*. 2nd March, 1968.
- . "Dynamic Gradient". *London Magazine*. March, 1965.
- . "Early Drafts of *Remake*". Held in Harry Ransom Centre.
- . "Ganging Up". *The Spectator*. 27th March, 1976.
- . "Illiterations". *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction*. Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, eds. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989.
- . *Invisible Author: Last Essays*. Columbus: Ohio State University, 2002.
- . Letter to Michael Schmidt dated 4/10/1996. Held in John Rylands Library.
- . Letter to Michael Schmidt dated 15/10/1996. Held in John Rylands Library.
- . Notes for *Such*. Held in Harry Ransom Centre.

- . *Omnibus*. Manchester: Carcanet, 2006.
- . *Remake*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1996.
- . "Remaking". Lecture for *Solothurn* in 1996. Held in John Rylands Library.
- . *Stories, Theories and Things*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.
- . "The Dissolution of Character in the Novel". *Reconstructing Individualism*. Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna and David E. Wellbery, eds. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986.
- . "The Nouveau Roman". *Times Literary Supplement*. 7th August, 1969.
- . "Vanishing Author". *The Observer*. 12th February, 1961.
- . "Viewpoint". *Times Literary Supplement*. 1st June, 1973.
- Brooke-Rose, Christine and Tom Boncza-Tomaszewski. "The Texterminator". *The Independent on Sunday*. 27th March, 2005.
- Brooke-Rose, Christine, Keith Cohen and David Hayman. "An Interview with Christine Brooke-Rose". *Contemporary Literature*. Vol. 17, No. 1 (Winter, 1976). U of Wisconsin P.
- Browne, Michael Dennis. "In his own Alan". *Review of Contemporary Fiction No. 17 (2)* 1997.
- Buckeye, Robert. *Re: Quin*. Dublin: Dalkey Archive Press, 2013.
- Burgess, Anthony. "Characters in Orbit". *The Yorkshire Post*. 8th February, 1962.
- . "Foreword". *Beyond the Words: Eleven Writers in Search of a New Fiction*. Giles Gordon, ed. London: Hutchinson, 1975.
- . "Poetry for a Tiny Room". *The Yorkshire Post*. 16th May, 1963.
- . Telegram about *M/F*. Undated. Held in International Anthony Burgess Foundation.
- . *The Novel Now*. London: Faber and Faber, 1967.
- . *You've Had Your Time*. London: Heinemann, 1990.
- Burns, Alan. *Accident in Art: An Outline*. Unpublished. Held in Lilly Library.
- . *Babel*. London: Calder and Boyars, 1969.
- . *Buster*. *New Writers 1*. London: John Calder, 1961.

- . *Celebrations*. London: Calder and Boyars, 1967.
- . *Dreamerika!: A Surrealist Fantasy*. London: Calder and Boyars, 1972.
- . *Europe After the Rain*. London: John Calder, 1965.
- . "Essay". *Beyond the Words: Eleven Writers in Search of a New Fiction*. Giles Gordon, ed. London: Hutchinson, 1975.
- . Guest list for party hosted by Calder & Boyars. 19th June, 1969. Held in Lilly Library.
- . "Human Like the Rest of Us: The Life of B.S. Johnson". *Review of Contemporary Fiction*. Summer 1997. Vol. 17, No. 2.
- . Interview with Charles Sugnet. *The Imagination on Trial*. Alan Burns and Charles Sugnet, eds. London: Allison and Busby, 1981.
- . Letter to B.S. Johnson. 1st July, 1973. Held in British Library.
- . Letter to B.S. Johnson. 4th July, 1973. Held in British Library.
- . Letter to B.S. Johnson. 25th May, 1971. Held in British Library.
- . Letter to Marion Boyars. 11th November, 1966. Held in Lilly Library.
- . "Remember Palach". Letter to Charles Marowitz. 26th October, 1969. Held in Lilly Library.
- . *The Angry Brigade: A Documentary Novel*. London: Quartet Books, 1973.
- , ed. *To Deprave and Corrupt*. London: Davis Poynter, 1972.
- Burns, Alan and Charles Sugnet, eds. *The Imagination on Trial*. London: Allison and Busby, 1981.
- Burroughs, William S. and Brion Gysin. *The Third Mind*. London: John Calder, 1979.
- Burroughs, William S. and Jeff Shiro. "Revolt!". *Burroughs Live 1960 – 1997*. Sylvere Lotringer, ed. New York: Semiotext(e), 2001.
- Burroughs, William S. and Pierre Dommergues. "Recipes for a Liberation". Richard C. Leeds, trans. *Burroughs Live 1960 – 1997*. Sylvere Lotringer, ed. New York: Semiotext(e), 2001.
- Butler, Valerie. "Institutional Negotiations: B.S. Johnson and the BBC (1959 – 73)". *Re-reading B.S. Johnson*. Philip Tew and Glyn White, eds. New York: Palgrave

Macmillan, 2007.

Byatt, A.S. "People in Paper Houses: Attitudes to 'Realism' and 'Experimentalism' in English Post-War fiction". *The Contemporary English Novel*. Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer, eds. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980.

Calder, John. *Pursuit: The Uncensored Memoirs of John Calder*. London: Calder, 2001.

---. "The Novel". *The Arts in a Permissive Society*. Christopher Macy, ed. London: Pemberton Books, 1971.

---. "Through that Tunnel". *Review of Contemporary Fiction No. 17 (2) 1997*.

Calder and Boyars Publishers. Invitation to B.S. Johnson. 25th April, 1972. Held in British Library.

---. Invitation to B.S. Johnson. 22nd June, 1970. Held in British Library.

---. Record of launch party for Alan Burns' *Europe After the Rain*. Held in Lilly Library.

Carpenter, Humphrey. *That Was the Satire that Was: The Satire Boom of the 1960s*. London: Gollancz, 2000.

Castoriadis, Cornelius. "The Social Imaginary". *Class*. Patrick Joyce, ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995.

Choat, Simon. *Marx Through Poststructuralism*. London: Continuum, 2010.

Coe, Jonathan. *Like a Fiery Elephant: The Story of B.S. Johnson*. London: Picador, 2004.

Cole, G.D.H. *The Post-War Condition of Britain*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956.

Cook, Chris and John Stevenson. *Britain Since 1945*. London: Longman Group, 1996.

Corgas, Harry James. "The Holocaust in Fiction". *Holocaust Literature: A Handbook*. Saul S. Friedman, ed. London: Greenwood Press, 1993.

Cosh, Mary. "Short and Soft". *Glasgow Herald*. 22nd October, 1966.

Daily Express. 8th November, 1962.

Darlington, Joseph. "'Cell of One': B.S. Johnson, *Christie Malry* and The Angry Brigade". *B.S. Johnson and the Possibilities of the Avant-Garde*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

- . "The Composition of Christine Brooke-Rose's *Thru*: An Afterlife of May '68"
The Journal of European Studies. Forthcoming, 2015.
- . "'Not Supposed to be Human if you're a Teacher' – Ideological Shift and the British
 Post-War School Novel". *Proceedings of the Salford Postgraduate Annual
 Research Conference (SPARC) 2011*. Salford: U of Salford P, 2011.
- Davie, Elspeth. "Note". *Beyond the Words: Eleven Writers in Search of a New Fiction*.
 Giles Gordon, ed. London: Hutchinson, 1975.
- Davis, J.E. Letter to Eva Figs. 30th June, 1970. Held in British Library.
- Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Detroit: Black and Red, 1970.
- Dodd, Nonia Williams. "Researching Ann Quin at the Lilly Library". *The Lilly Library
 Blog*. 18th November, 2010.
- Eagleton, Terry. *The Illusions of Postmodernism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.
- Elsom, John. *Post-War British Theatre*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976.
- Evenson, Brian and Joanna Howard. "Ann Quin". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*,
 Vol. 23, No. 2.
- "Experiment". *Oxford English Dictionary*. Web. oxforddictionaries.com.
- Federman, Raymond, ed. *Surfiction*. Chicago: Swallow Press, 1975.
- Figs, Eva. "Accustomed as I am to Public Speaking". *New Humanist*. February, 1973.
- . "Aus Meinem Oxford-Alphabet". Draft submitted to *Merian*. 19th January, 1970.
 Held in British Library.
- . *B*. London: Faber and Faber, 1972.
- . "Bloomers and Battleaxes". *The Guardian*. 15th December, 1967.
- . "B.S. Johnson". *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*. Vol. 5, No. 2. Summer, 1985.
- . *Days*. Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1983.
- . "Dreaming". *Listener*, 1971.
- . *Equinox*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1966.
- . Interview with Alan Burns. *The Imagination on Trial*. Alan Burns and Charles Sugnet,
 eds. London: Allison and Busby, 1981.

- . *Journey to Nowhere*. London: Granta Books, 2008.
- . *Konek Landing*. London: Panther Books, 1972.
- . Letter to Christopher Macy. 20th June, 1972. Held in British Library.
- . Letter to Deborah Rogers. 21st April, 1969. Held in British Library.
- . *Little Eden: A Child at War*. London: Faber and Faber, 1978.
- . "Note". *Beyond the Words*. Giles Gordon, ed. London: Hutchinson, 1975.
- . "Opinion". *The Daily Telegraph Magazine*. 11th June, 1968.
- . *Patriarchal Attitudes*. London: Virago, 1978.
- . "Prosaic". Unpublished, undated. Held in British Library.
- . "The Generational War". *The Guardian*. 12th October, 1968.
- . "The Half-Hearted Revolution". *The Guardian*. 5th August, 1968.
- . "The Interior Landscape". Loose essay, 1968. Held in British Library.
- . "The New Humanism". *New Humanist*, 1973. Held in British Library.
- . "The Writer's Dilemma". *Guardian*. 17th June, 1968.
- . *Tragedy and Social Evolution*. London: John Calder, 1976.
- . "Troubles with State Monopoly". *New Humanist*. December, 1972.
- . *Winter Journey*. London: Faber and Faber, 1967.
- , ed. *Women's Letters in Wartime 1450 – 1945*. London: Pandora, 1993.
- Figes, John. Letter to Eva Figes. 1st March, 1967. Held in British Library.
- Findlater, Richard. *Banned! A Review of Theatrical Censorship in Britain*. London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967.
- Fogarty, Michael P. "Review". *International Review of Education*. London: Springer, 1973.
- Fountain, Nigel. *Underground: The London Alternative Press, 1966-1974*. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Fraser, Robert. "Introduction". *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Totem and Taboo*. James Strachey, trans. London: Routledge, 2001.

Frick, Thomas. "J.G. Ballard. The Art of Fiction, No. 85". *The Paris Review*. No. 94. Winter, 1984.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. London: Penguin, 2010.

Friedman, Ellen G. and Miriam Fuchs. "A Conversation with Christine Brooke-Rose".

Utterly Other Discourse: The Texts of Christine Brooke-Rose. Ellen G. Friedman and Richard Martin, eds. Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995.

Friedman, Ellen G. and Miriam Fuchs, eds. *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction*. London: Princeton UP, 1989.

Friedman, Norman. *Form and Meaning in Fiction*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1975. Print.

Gasiorek, Andrzej. *Post-War British Fiction: Realism and After*. London: Edward Arnold, 1995.

Ghose, Zulfikar. "Bryan". *Review of Contemporary Fiction*. Summer 1985. Vol. 5, No. 2.

---. Draft review of B.S. Johnson's *Travelling People*. 9th April, 1963. Held in British Library.

---. Letter to B.S. Johnson. 7th December, 1954. Held in British Library.

---. Letter to B.S. Johnson. 9th April, 1959. Held in British Library.

---. Letter to B.S. Johnson. 3rd October, 1960. Held in British Library.

---. Letter to B.S. Johnson. 7th March, 1963. Held in British Library.

---. Letter to B.S. Johnson. 22nd June, 1970. Held in British Library.

---. Letter to B.S. Johnson. 7th March, 1973. Held in British Library.

---. Letter to B.S. Johnson. 16th September, 1973. Held in British Library.

Ghose, Zulfikar and Bryan Johnson. *Prepar-a-Tory*. Undated, [1960]. Held in Harry Ransom Centre.

Gibbons, Ivan. "Angry People". *Fortnight no. 85, 1974*.

Gordon, Giles, ed. *Beyond the Words*. London: Hutchinson, 1975.

---. "Introduction". *Berg*. Chicago: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001.

---. "Introduction". *Beyond the Words*. Giles Gordon, ed. London: Hutchinson, 1975.

---. Letter to Christine Brooke-Rose. 30th March, 1974. Held in Harry Ransom Centre.

- . "Reading Ann Quin's *Berg*". *Context No. 8*. London: Dalkey Archive Press. Web. Accessed 8/3/2013.
- Graeber, Laurel. "New Beginnings in Middle Age". *New York Times Book Review*. 25th September, 1988.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*. David Forgacs, ed. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999.
- Hardy, Barbara. "Guessing Games with Ezra Pound". *The Spectator*. 15th January, 1972.
- Harris, Paul. Contribution. *In Defence of Literature: For John Calder*. Howard Aster, ed. New York: Mosaic Press, 1999.
- Hartley, Jenny. *Millions Like Us: British Women's Fiction of the Second World War*. London: Virago, 1997.
- Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007.
- . *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.
- Heppenstall, Rayner. *Portrait of the Artist as a Professional Man*. London: Peter Owen, 1969.
- . *The Master Eccentric: The Journals of Rayner Heppenstall, 1969-1981*. Jonathan Goodman, ed. London: Allison and Busby, 1986.
- Herbert, Victor. Contribution. *In Defence of Literature: For John Calder*. Howard Aster, ed. New York: Mosaic Press, 1999.
- Hesse, Eva. Letter to Christine Brooke-Rose. 19th March, 1968. Held in Harry Ransom Centre.
- Hewison, Robert. *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940*. London: Mathuen, 1995.
- Hoggart, Richard. *The Uses of Literacy*. London: Penguin, 1992.
- Holland, Steve. *The Mushroom Jungle: A History of Postwar Paperback Publishing*. Wistbury: Zeon Books, 1993.
- Hunt, Albert. "The Film". *Discrimination and Popular Culture*. Denys Thompson, ed. London: Pelican, 1965.

- Jameson, Fredric. *Brecht and Method*. London: Verso, 1998.
- . *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso, 1991.
- Jefferson, Ann. *The Nouveau Roman and the Poetics of Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980.
- Johnson, B.S. *Albert Angelo. The B.S. Johnson Omnibus*. London: Picador, 2004.
- . "And Should She Die?" *Penguin Modern Poets 25*. London: Penguin Books, 1975.
- . *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?* London: Hutchinson, 1973.
- . "Bad News for Her Mother". *Penguin Modern Poets 25*. London: Penguin Books, 1975.
- . *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry*. London: Picador, 2001.
- . *House Mother Normal. The B.S. Johnson Omnibus*. London: Picador, 2004.
- . "Interview with Alan Burns". *The Imagination on Trial*. Alan Burns and Charles Sugnet, eds. London: Allison and Busby, 1981.
- . "Knowing". *Penguin Modern Poets 25*. London: Penguin Books, 1975.
- . Letter to Eva Figes. 23rd March, 1972. Held in British Library.
- . Letter to Zulfikar Ghose. 26th December, 1971. Held in British Library.
- . *Notebook 3*. Started 23rd April, 1959. Held in British Library.
- . *Notebook 4*. Started 29th July, 1959. Held in British Library.
- . *Notebook 5*. Started 3rd June, 1960. Held in British Library.
- . *Notebook 7*. Started 1964. Held in British Library.
- . *Notebook 8*. Started 1st May, 1969. Held in British Library.
- . *See the Old Lady Decently*. New York: Viking Press, 1975.
- . *The Unfortunates*. Jonathan Coe, intro. London: Picador, 1999.
- . *Trawl. The B.S. Johnson Omnibus*. London: Picador, 2004.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature*. R.F.C. Hull, trans. London: Routledge, 1967.
- Keynes, John Maynard. *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*. London: B.N. Publishing, 2008.

- Kirby, Alan. *Digimodernism*. London: Continuum, 2009.
- Klein, Dennis. "The Fate of Holocaust Literature". *Holocaust Literature: A Handbook*. Saul S. Friedman, ed. London: Greenwood Press, 1993.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.
- Lahr, John. "Introduction". *Joe Orton: The Complete Plays*. London: Methuen Drama, 1976.
- Lecerclé, Jean-Jacques. "Reading Amalgamemnon". *Utterly Other Discourse: The Texts of Christine Brooke-Rose*. Ellen G. Friedman and Richard Martin, eds. Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995.
- Lessing, Doris. *Walking in the Shade: Volume Two of My Autobiography, 1949 – 1962*. London: Harper Collins, 1997.
- Levi, Primo. *Survival in Auschwitz*. London: Collier Books, 2000.
- Levitt, Morton P. "B.S. Johnson". *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 14, 1985*.
- Lewis, Jane. *Women in Britain since 1945*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.
- Little, Judy. *The Experimental Self: Dialogic Subjectivity in Woolf, Pym, and Brooke Rose*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1996.
- Lotringer, Sylvère. "Exterminating". *Burroughs Live: 1960 – 1997*. Sylvère Lotringer, ed. New York: Semiotext(e), 2001.
- Lowe, Rodney. *The Welfare State in Britain Since 1945*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Madden, David W. "Alan Burns: An Introduction". *Review of Contemporary Fiction No. 17 (2) 1997*.
- . "An Interview with Alan Burns". *Review of Contemporary Fiction No. 17 (2) 1997*.
- Manvell, Roger. *Films and the Second World War*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1974.
- Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilisation*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956.
- . *One-Dimensional Man*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.
- Marks, Howard. *Mr Nice*. London: Vintage, 1998.

- Martin, Richard. "‘Just Words on a Page’: The Novels of Christine Brooke-Rose". *Utterly Other Discourse: The Texts of Christine Brooke-Rose*. Ellen G. Friedman and Richard Martin, eds. Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995.
- Marwick, Arthur. *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958 – c. 1975*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital, Volume 1*. London: Oxford World Classics, 2008.
- McCordle, J.F. *Transatlantic Review 14*. London: Roundwood Press, Autumn 1963.
- McHale, Brian. "‘I draw the line as a rule between one solar system and another’: The Postmodernism(s) of Christine Brooke-Rose". *Utterly Other Discourse: The Texts of Christine Brooke-Rose*. Ellen G. Friedman and Richard Martin, eds. Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995.
- . *Postmodernist Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Mengham, Rod. "In the Net: B.S. Johnson, the Biography and *Trawl*". *Re-Reading B.S. Johnson*. Philip Tew and Glyn White, eds. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- . "Introduction". *An Introduction to Contemporary Fiction: international Writing in English since 1970*. London: Polity, 1999.
- Middleton, Roger. "Keynes’ Legacy for Post-War Economic Management". *Post-War Britain, 1945 – 64: Themes and Perspectives*. Anthony Gorst, Lewis Johnman and W. Scott Lucas, eds. London: Pinter, 1989.
- Miliband, Ralph. *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour*. Ponypool: Fernwood Publishing, 1972.
- Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. London: Virago, 1977.
- Moore, Nathan. "Nova Law: William S. Burroughs and the Logic of Control". *Law and Literature, Vol. 19, No. 3*. Los Angeles: U of California P, 2007.
- Morgan, Ted. *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs*. London: Pimlico, 1991.
- Morley, Loraine. "The Love Affair(s) of Ann Quin". *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)*, Vol. 5, No. 2. Debrecen: Centre of Arts, Humanities

- and Sciences (CAHS), 1999.
- “Mr. Calder Takes a Civil Liberty”. *In Defence of Literature: For John Calder*. Howard Aster, ed. New York: Mosaic Press, 1999.
- Nadeau, Maurice. *The French Novel Since the War*. A.M. Sheridan Smith, trans. London: Methuen, 1967.
- Neugeboren, Jay. “The Texture of Life Lived”. *Review of Contemporary Fiction No. 17* (2) 1997.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*. Shaun Whiteside, trans. Michael Tanner, ed. London: Penguin, 2003.
- Nuttall, Jeff. *Bomb Culture*. St Albans: Paladin, 1970.
- Oakley, Ann. *Housewife*. London: Penguin, 1990.
- . *Sex, Gender and Society*. London: Temple Smith, 1972.
- Orr, John. *Tragic Realism and Modern Society: Studies in the Sociology of the Modern Novel*. London: Macmillan, 1977.
- Oxenhandler, Neal. “Listening to Burroughs’ Voice”. *Surfiction*. Raymond Federman, ed. Chicago: Swallow Press, 1975.
- Palmer, Tony. *The Trials of Oz*. London: Blond and Briggs, 1971.
- Phillips, Tom. “Introduction”. *A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2012.
- Poulantzas, Nicos. “The New Petty Bourgeoisie”. *Class and Class Structure*. Alan Hunt, ed. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977.
- Quin, Ann. *Berg*. Chicago: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001.
- . “From *The Unmapped Country*: an unfinished novel”. *Beyond the Words*. Giles Gordon, ed. London: Hutchinson, 1975.
- . Letter to Larry Goodell. 25th September, 1969. Posted on Ann Quin Facebook Page.
- . List of Recommended Books [approx. 1960s]. Posted on Ann Quin Facebook Page.
- . *Passages*. Chicago: Dalkey Archive Press, 2003.
- . *Three*. Brian Evenson, intro. Chicago: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001.

- . *Tripticks*. Carol Annand, illustrations. Chicago: Dalkey Archive Press, 2002.
- Rabinovitz, Rubin. "Mass Art and Cultural Decline". *Journal of Popular Culture*. Vol. 9, 1975.
- Rees, Gareth and John Lambert. *Cities in Crisis: The Political Economy of Urban Development in Post-War Britain*. London: Edward Arnold, 1985.
- Reyes, Heather. "The British and their 'Fixions', the French and their Factions". *Utterly Other Discourse: The Texts of Christine Brooke-Rose*. Ellen G. Friedman and Richard Martin, eds. Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995.
- Reynolds, Simon. *Retromania*. London: Faber and Faber, 2011.
- Robinson, H. and C.G. Bamford. *Geography of Transport*. London: Macdonal and Evans, 1978.
- Ross, Kristin. *May '68 and its Afterlives*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002.
- Roszak, Theodore. *The Making of a Counter Culture*. London: Faber and Faber, 1970.
- Rourke, Lee. "Book of a Lifetime: *Berg* by Ann Quin". *The Independent*. 27th August, 2010.
- Rubin, Jerry. *Do It!* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970.
- Ryf, Robert S. "B.S. Johnson and the Frontiers of Fiction". *Critique*, Vol. 19. Glasgow, 1977.
- Sampson, Anthony. *Anatomy of Britain Today*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965.
- Sandbrook, Dominic. *White Heat: A History of the Swinging Sixties*. London: Little, Brown, 2006.
- Schiele, Jinnie. *Off-Centre Stages: Fringe Theatre at the Open Space and the Round House 1968 – 1983*. London: The Society for Theatre Research, 2005.
- Seddon, Melanie. "B.S. Johnson and Maureen Duffy: Aspiring Writers." *BSJ: The B.S. Johnson Journal*, Issue 1. Forthcoming. 2014.
- Seymore-Ure, Colin. *The British Press and Broadcasting Since 1945*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.
- Short, John R. *Housing in Britain: The Post-war Experience*. London: Mathuen, 1982.

- Stevick, Philip. "Voices in the Head: Style and Consciousness in the Fiction of Ann Quin". *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction*. Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, eds. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989.
- Sugnet, Charles. "Burns' Aleatoric Celebrations: Smashing Hegemony at the Sentence Level". *Review of Contemporary Fiction No. 17 (2) 1997*.
- . "Introduction". *The Imagination on Trial*. Alan Burns and Charles Sugnet, eds. London: Allison and Busby, 1981.
- Tew, Philip. *B.S. Johnson: A Critical Reading*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001. Print.
- . "(Re)-Acknowledging B.S. Johnson's Radical Realism, or Re-Publishing *The Unfortunates*". *Critical Survey, Vol. 13, Issue 1*. 1st January, 2001.
- . *The Contemporary British Novel*. London: Continuum, 2007.
- Tew, Philip and Glyn White. "Introduction: Re-Reading B.S. Johnson." *Re-Reading B.S. Johnson*. Philip Tew and Glyn White, eds. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Thane, Pat. "Towards Equal Opportunities? Women in Britain since 1945". *Britain Since 1945*. Terry Gourvish and Alan O'Day, eds. London: Macmillan, 1991.
- The Times*, 2nd October, 1963.
- Thomas, Donald. *Freedom's Frontier: Censorship in Modern Britain*. London: John Murray, 2008.
- Thompson, Ben, ed. *Ban this Filth!: Letters from the Mary Whitehouse Archive*. London: Faber and Faber, 2012.
- Thompson, Denys. "Introduction". *Discrimination and Popular Culture*. London: Penguin, 1965.
- Thompson, E.P. "The Making of Class". *Class*. Patrick Joyce, ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995.
- Tredell, Nicolas. *Fighting Fictions: The Novels of B.S. Johnson*. Nottingham: Pauper's Press, 2010.
- Ward, Geoff. "The Mutations of William Burroughs". *An Introduction to Contemporary Fiction: International Writing in English since 1970*. London: Polity, 1999.

- Watts, Carol. "The Mind has Fuses': Detonating B.S. Johnson". *Re-Reading B.S. Johnson*. Philip Tew and Glyn White, eds. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Waxman, Zoe Vania. *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006.
- Webb, Bill. "Calder vs. The Old Boys". *In Defence of Literature: For John Calder*. New York: Mosaic Press, 1999.
- Wells, Juliette. "Eva Figes". *Twentieth-Century British and Irish Fiction*. Brian Shaffer, ed. London: Wiley Blackwell, 2011.
- When, Francis. *Strange Days Indeed: The Golden Age of Paranoia*. London: Fourth Estate, 2009.
- White, Glyn. *Reading the Graphic Surface: The Presence of the Book in Prose Fiction*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2005.
- . "'You Are Here': Reading and Representation in Christine Brooke-Rose's *Thru*". *Poetics Today*, Vol. 23, No. 4. Winter, 2002.
- White, Glyn and John Mundy. *Laughing Matters: Understanding Film, Television and Radio Comedy*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2012.
- Willatt, Hugh (Sir). *The Arts Council of Great Britain: The First 25 Years*. London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1971.
- Williams, Raymond. *Britain in the Sixties: Communications*. London: Penguin Books, 1962.
- . "Culture and Technology." *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*. Tony Pinkney, ed. London: Verso, 2007.
- . "The Politics of the Avant Garde." *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*. Tony Pinkney, ed. London: Verso, 2007.
- Wilkins, Jill. Letter to Eva Figes. 19th May, 1970. Held in British Library.
- Wolfe, Tom. *The Mid-Atlantic Man and Other New Breeds in England and America*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Three Guineas*. Mary Shiach, ed. London: Oxford Classics, 2000.

Young, Michael. *The Rise of the Meritocracy, 1870-2033*. London: Pelican, 1958.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*. London: Routledge, 2004.

---. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989.

---. "The Superego and the Act: A Lecture". *The European Graduate School Website*. August, 1999. Web. 5th March, 2013.

Figures

Figure 1: Ngram search for term "experimental literature"



Figure 2: Ngram search for terms "Groovy" and "Space Age"

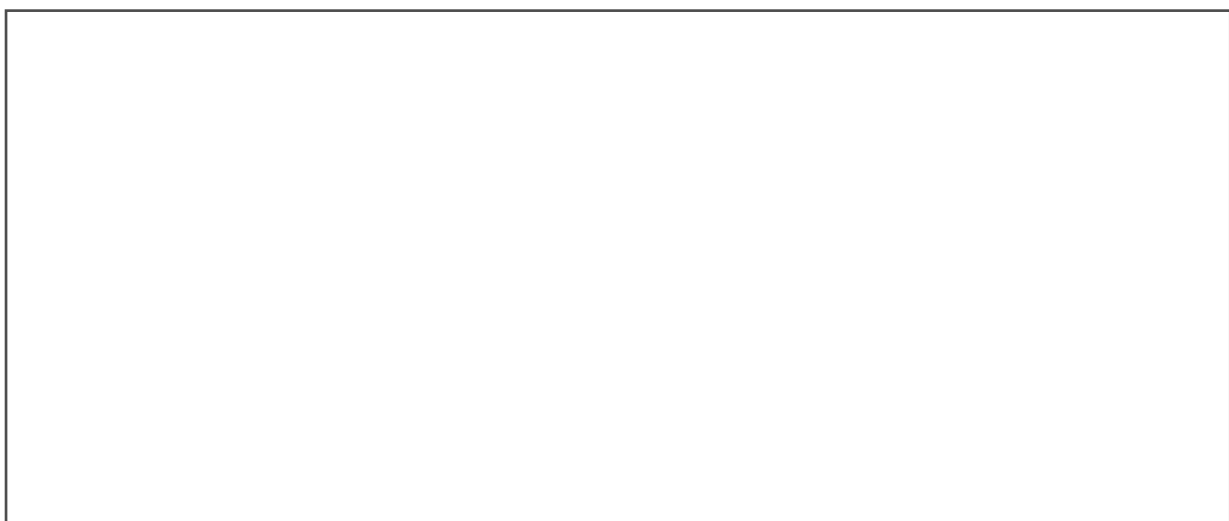


Figure 3: Pages 110 and 111 of Alan Burns' *Dreamerika*

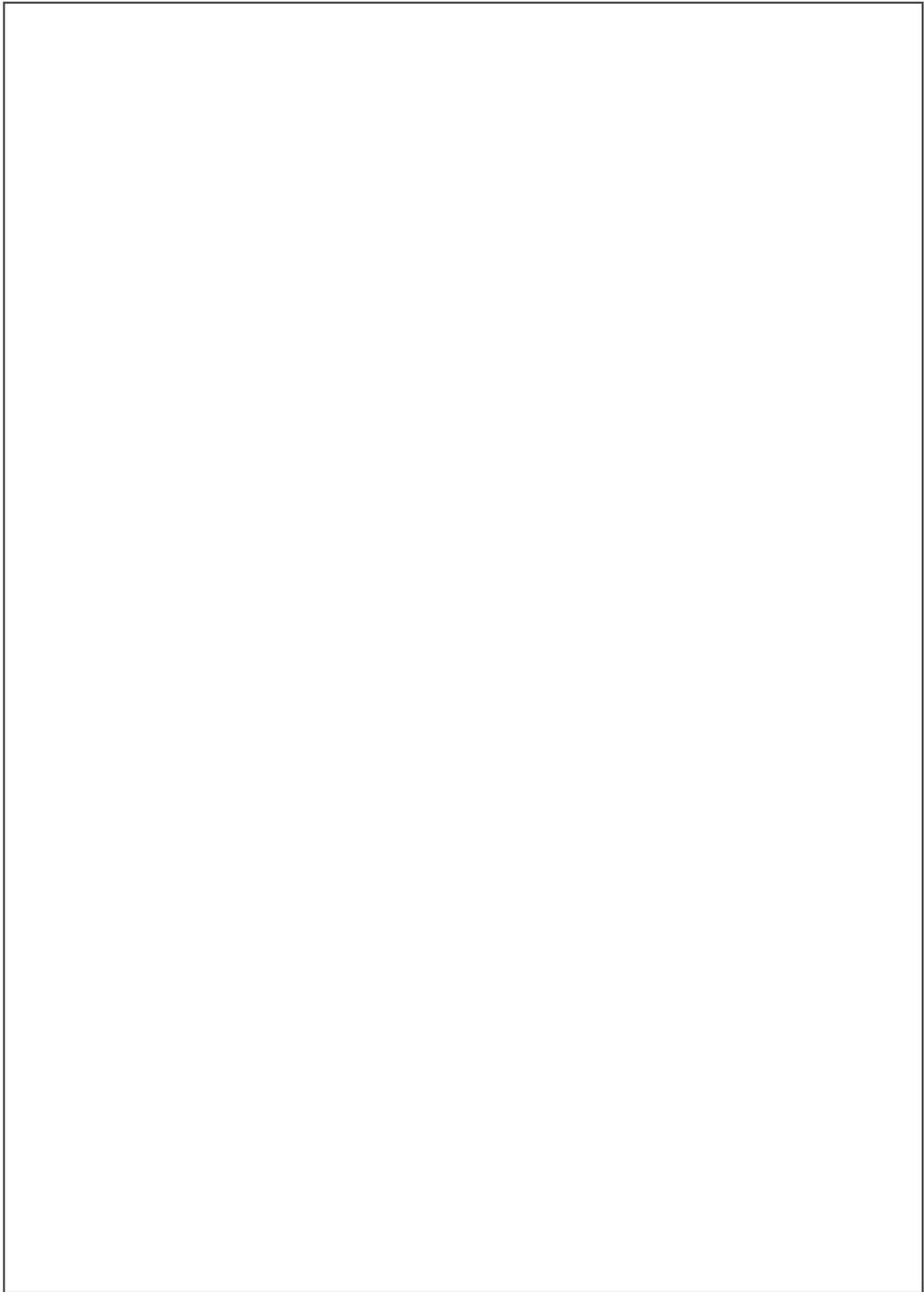


Figure 4: Pages 618 and 619 of Christine Brooke-Rose's *Thru* (The Carcanet *Omnibus* edition)

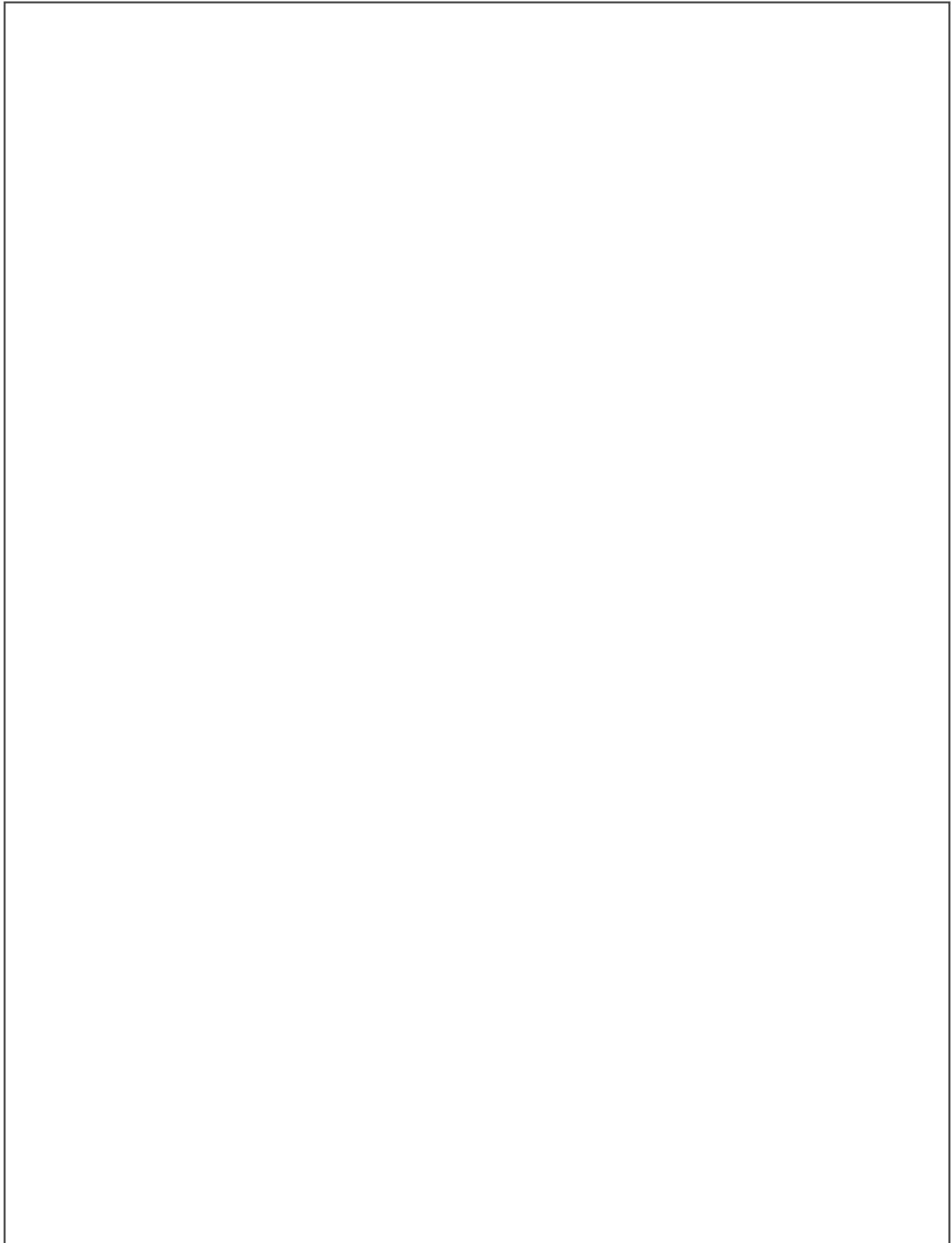


Figure 5: Pages 88 and 89 of B.S. Johnson's *Albert Angelo*

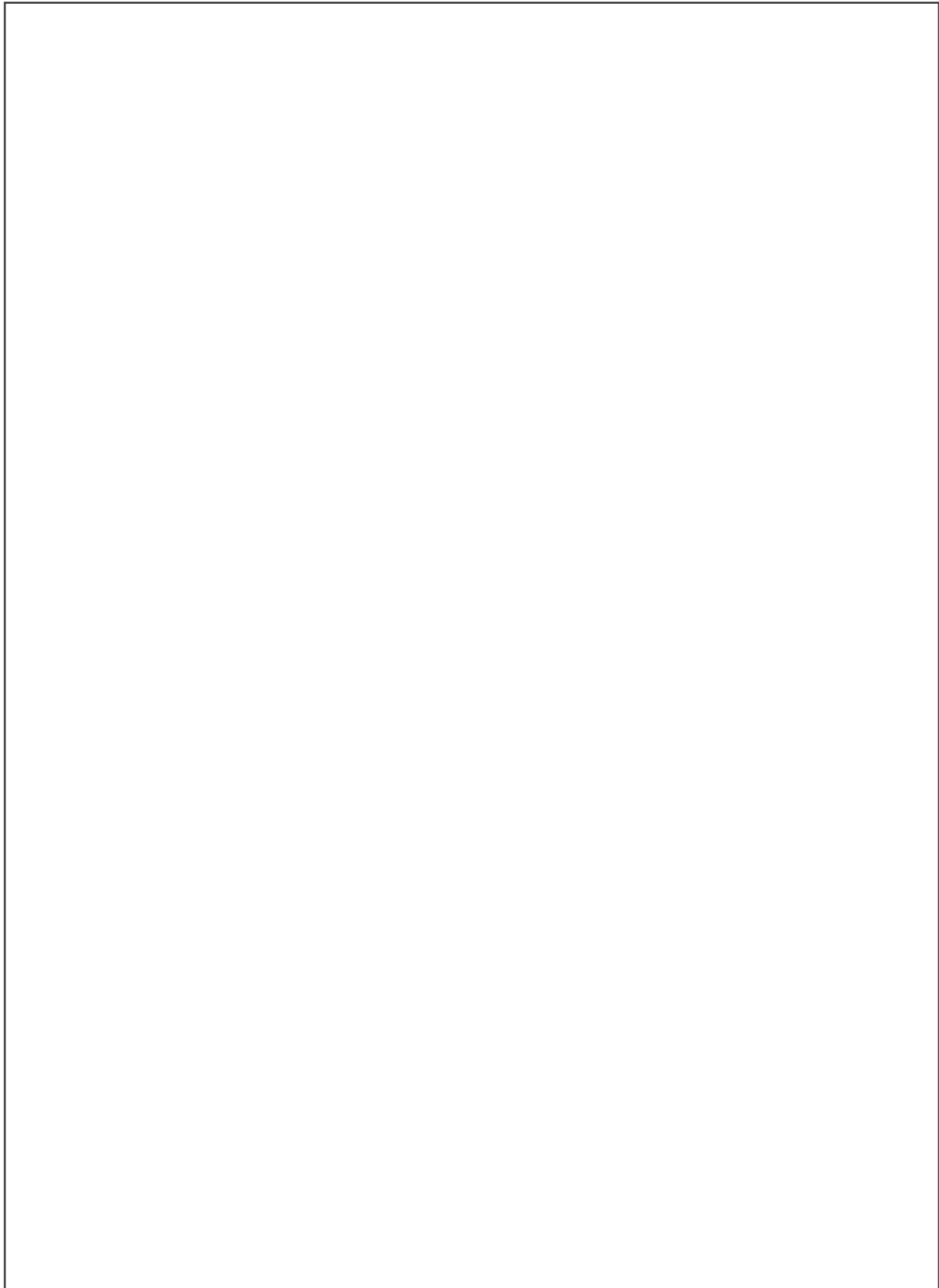


Figure 6: Ngram search for term "The Establishment"

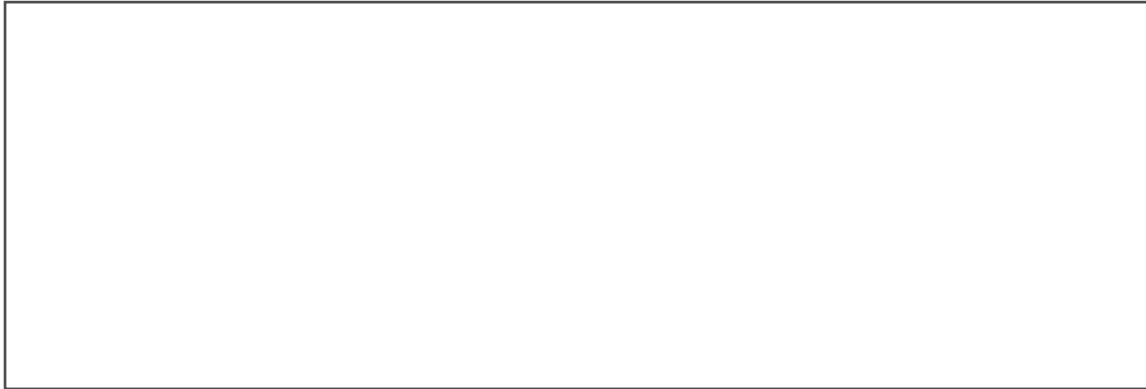


Figure 7: Tables from Lowe (pg. 286)

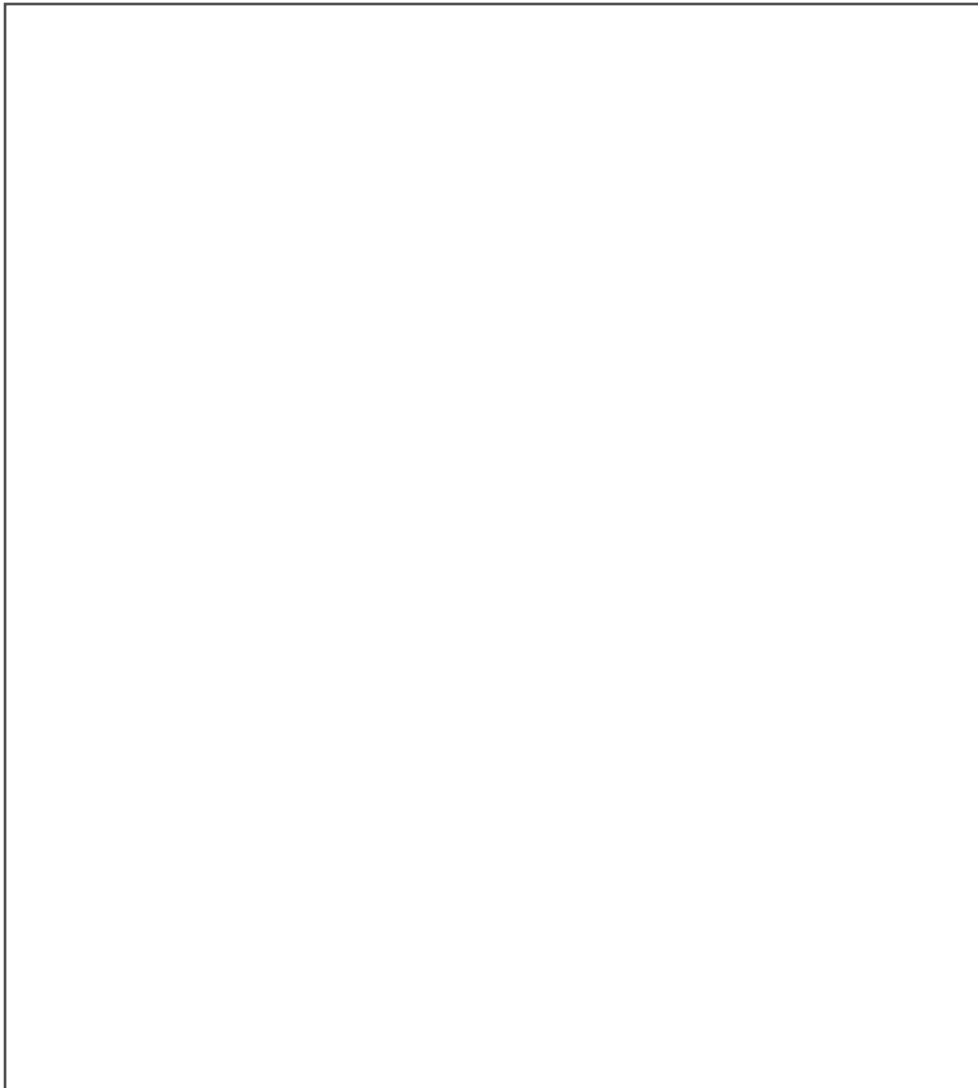


Figure 8: Table from Short (pg. 30)



Figure 9: Graph from Short (pg. 224)

[pic]

Figure 10: Table from Sampson (pg. 196)

[pic]

Figure 11: Table from Willatt (pg. 11)

Figure 12: Graph from Harvey (pg. 146)

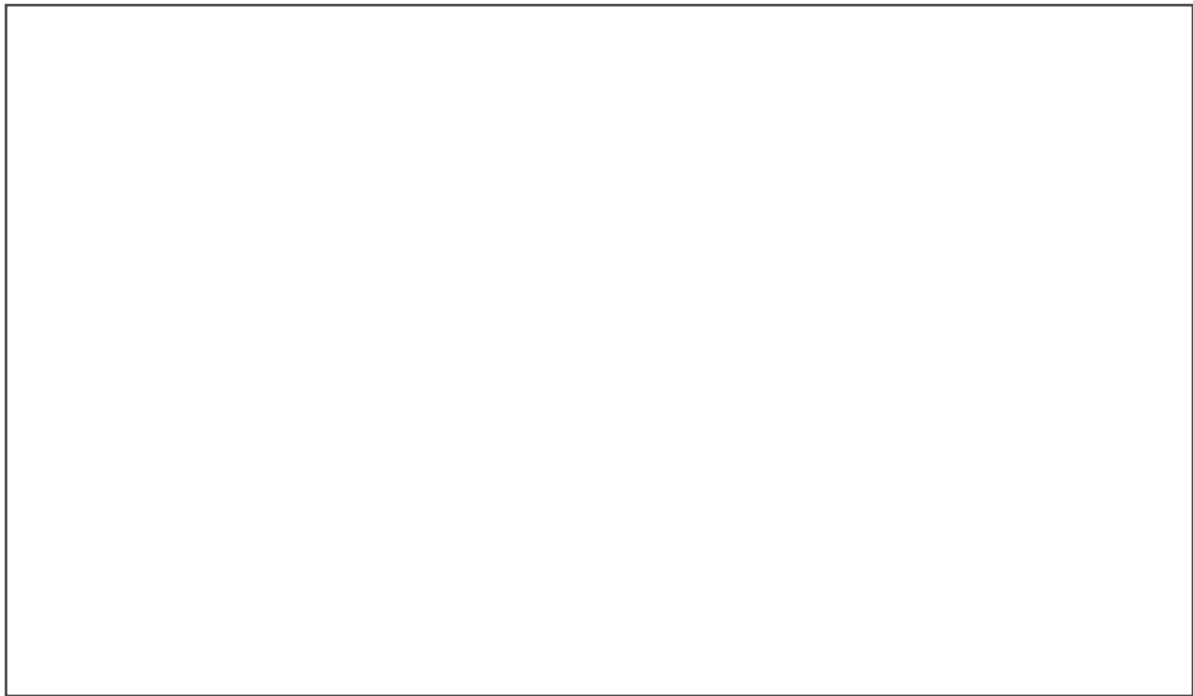
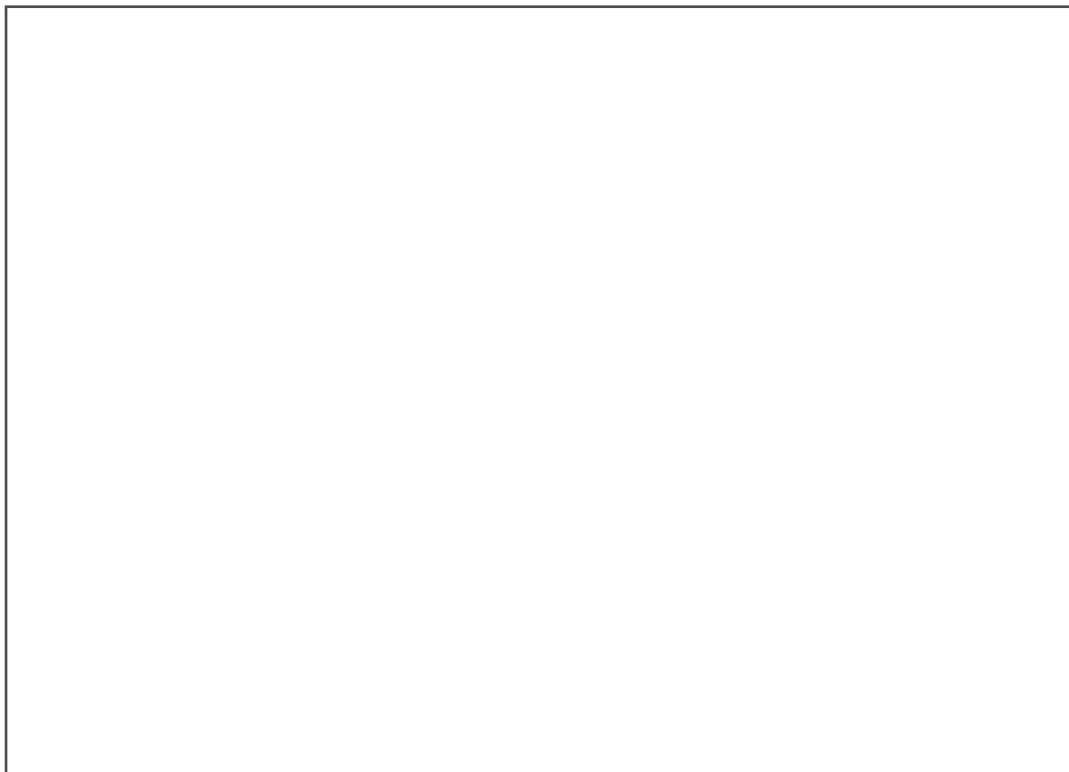


Figure 13:



[1] Speaking to Jonathan Coe for *Like a Fiery Elephant*, Joebear Webb recounts this saying of Johnson's - "I make experiments but I don't show them to anybody" (397) – with the implication that it was a phrase he often returned to in conversation.

[2] Simon Reynolds, paraphrasing Tom Wolfe in *Retromania*, indicates how culture's enthusiasm for the "Space Age" worked in both directions. At NASA "there had been a frenzy of missions, five between December 1968 and 1969. But... the lay-offs began while Armstrong and Aldrin were still on their victory tour. Its annual budget sank from \$5 billion in the mid-sixties to \$3 billion in the mid-seventies" (387). The public interest in Big Science was directly reflected in government budgeting.

[3] Zulfikar Ghose, in spite of being very close to Johnson, was not as familiar with the others. In a letter of 16/9/73 he describes having only met Quin "briefly one winter [when] I went twice to a group of writers, mostly Calder people, in Hampstead (and then abandoned them because they bored me with their pious outlook)".

[4] A comparison with the experimental attitudes occurring in American literature, for example, demonstrates how in the place of a critique about class and manners there more often appears a critique of popular and high cultural form. Federman's 1975 *Surfiction* promotes the "death of literature" as an anti-canonising gesture, while Rubin Rabinovitz, in "Mass Art and Cultural Decline", invokes film and rock music as a remedy to a modernist art which appears to be "assuming the role of the defunct aristocracy" (369). The British experimental novelists' belief in the redemption of the serious novel as a radical act is anathema to the American situation.

[5] A further reading of influences could be developed here; aspects of Figes' writing "in the moment" being similar to Gruppe 47 practice and Brooke-Rose's invisible constraints borrowed from Oulipo. The results of all of these "experimental" methods, however, is always framed by the particularly British opposition to the Nineteenth Century mode.

[6] Whether it was Burns' personal influence is uncertain, but Calder too predicted a future in which readers would "be able to lie in bed, in the dark, with our eyes closed, and read in our minds a printed page, or perhaps simply a film, projected inside our skulls, through the media of wires attached to our skulls" ("The Novel", 53)

[7] Living spaces and the pride that comes with acquiring property is a little-noticed theme which recurs in Johnson's work. He notes this pride in his friend Tony in *The Unfortunates*, comments on architecture's relation to class throughout *Albert Angelo* and, according to Ghose, proudly showed off the "room where he will write" upon buying "a house in Dagmar Terrace" ("Bryan", 34).

[8] Although *Beyond the Words* does not feature Christine Brooke-Rose, letters between the two writers held in the Harry Ransom Centre show that she was invited, accepted, but was unable to contribute the section from *Thru* that she intended to due to her publisher stepping in to prevent it (Letter).

[9] The overlaps between "experimental" literature and "underground" counterculture are fewer than one might expect. Ann Quin, as one of the only drug users amongst the group, demonstrates considerable influences of "hippy" culture in her novels – especially *Tripticks*. B.S. Johnson, on the other hand, successfully sued *The Daily Mail* for labelling him a "hippy". From the counterculture's perspective, as Charles Shaar Murray explained during the *Oz* trial, "Underground literature is virtually non-existent: Burroughs, Ginsberg and the late Jack Kerouac" (Palmer, 50) – no British authors, or even Sixties authors, are considered.

[10] Anti-Oxbridge feeling may be one of the reasons that Christine Brooke-Rose distanced herself from other writers undertaking similar experimental projects to her own, she having been educated at Somerville College, Oxford.

[11] Indeed, the early 1960s “Satire Boom” and much of the countercultural “underground” can be traced back to Oxbridge graduates. Similarly, New Left figures like Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall sit comfortably between “Establishment” Oxbridge and the revolutionary left. As with the theory used in this thesis, any lack of subtlety involved in the categorisation of Oxbridge is here reflecting the collective experiences of the writers (other than Brooke-Rose). The perceived exclusivity of Oxbridge networks has a demonstrative psychological effect on uniting non-Oxbridge “experimental” writers in a shared cause.

[12] This was an approach shared by the publishers of the Hungarian translation who presented the text as a bound paperback. The reasons for this editorial intervention were most likely financial, however, rather than aesthetic.

[13] Interestingly, both Giles Gordon and Alan Burns move in their interviews from Johnson’s physicality to his wife’s beauty – seemingly justifying Johnson’s attitudes towards “investment” in women by implying that her attractiveness cancelled out his repellentness.

[14] Another highly evocative example of Johnson’s class position amongst “Them” can be seen in his third notebook in which he makes a note of the middle class phrase “very comfortable people”. Clearly the phrase had struck him as worthy of writing down to be used elsewhere. The intention behind its future usage is demonstrated by an erratic, almost furious scribbling underlining of the word “comfortable”. The euphemistic language of the middle class is clearly the opposite of what Johnson would consider “truth”.

[15] It may be argued that the “Interview with Father Joe” is in fact an internal dialogue that Johnson was having with himself, or with a character. However, the rushed note-taking style of its presentation and the fact that this technique of character development is not notable anywhere else would make this reading far less likely than assuming that the interview actually occurred – especially when Johnson’s background in journalism and his commitment to “truth” (especially regarding his actual trip on a trawler for *Trawl*) is also factored in.

[16] “Prosaic” was, at the time of writing, held in the British Library and appears in a file containing various loose papers dated between 1968 and 1972.

[17] See Juliette Wells for the Woolf/Figes connection.

[18] These statistics represent what an economist would term “full employment”; the 1 to 2 per cent unemployment rate accounting for “structural unemployment” inevitable in any system outside of forced labour.

[19] An example of the subject control verb would be “John *refuses* to work”, rather than “John is not working”.

[20] Another circuitous connection can be found between Burroughs and Burns from the year 1970. Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch* was the first book to be acquitted of an obscenity charge after the United States liberalised its obscenity laws in 1966 (Morgan, 342-343). This precedent opened the door to a dramatic rise in the amount of “hardcore” pornography published, leading to the establishment of the “United States Commission on Obscenity and Pornography” whose reported findings, published in 1970, were edited for a British audience by Alan Burns in his role as former barrister, appearing as 1972’s *To Deprave and Corrupt*.

[21] Burns goes on to use tape recording as the primary means of compiling material for *The Angry Brigade* (1973). The use of “transcription” is also seen in Ann Quin’s *Three*, another Calder-published novel.

[22] Interestingly, Burns' use of "found material" can be seen to originate here in the form of self-plagiarism. According to an interview with Madden appearing in the *Review of Contemporary Fiction* in 1997, "'Johnson in the Modern Eye', the essay... was originally written by me aged 16 and published in the school magazine" (110). Framed by Burns' fictionalising narrative, however, this well-received essay is presented as having the opposite effect – getting the protagonist expelled.

[23] Charles Sugnet, in "Burn's Aleatoric *Celebrations*: Smashing Hegemony at the Sentence Level", describes a number of Burns' more unusual uses of his raw material, for example, "he, himself a lawyer, described the lawyers in *Celebrations* via a treatise on the mating habits of grasshoppers" (194). As will be seen, this process of incorporating seemingly unrelated material into his texts continues as far as *The Angry Brigade* and, although not covered here, is included in the later work *The Day Daddy Died*.

[24] A view of Burns' novels as individual pieces contributing to an overall experimental "movement" would justify B.S. Johnson's remarks in his eighth notebook: "BABEL, it needed to be done, the way clear, now no one else needs to do it – valuable function" (16).

[25] Burns himself reportedly used writing in a similar manner on a daily basis to provide structure to the seemingly spontaneous act of holding conversations: "before I meet someone, I make notes of topics that I'm going to talk about... not important business matters but just chit chat, maybe politics, I don't know." (Coe, 397). This habit, redolent of Burns' works' structured spontaneity infuriated B.S. Johnson whose own sensibilities concerning authenticity were no doubt deeply offended.

[26] "To give a rather curious example: I had a friend, a young woman, who had to visit the dentist on a number of occasions. This dismal experience was made worse by the fact that as she sat there the dentist and his nurse, between whom there seemed to be something cooking, would gossip away one to the other, excluding the patient... [This is rewritten as a periphery character visiting the group's squat and] being aware there were things going on that she was not part of, being distressed and disturbed and a bit frightened" (*The Imagination on Trial*, 164-165)

[27] Robert Buckeye's 2013 pamphlet *Re: Quin* appeared too late to be included within this chapter. As the work contains no new research this should not pose too great a problem.

[28] British obscenity law is a subsection of libel law.

[29] In a speech to the Rationalist Press Association's annual conference in 1970, John Calder introduced himself in terms of his role as "Secretary in the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society, the principle body fighting Mary Whitehouse and fighting the various bodies that are trying to turn the clock back" ("The Novel", 52).

[30] Calder himself complained of how "one of the effects of the permissive society has been that erotica is no longer a guarantee that the book is going to sell" ("The Novel", 51).

[31] It is Artaud who allegedly first brought Marowitz into contact with the Calder circle – specifically Alan Burns, his collaborator on *Palach*. Schiele describes an event reported in the *Guardian* (30th April 1970) when a local dignitary at the Harrogate Festival spoke of "the need for modern artists to remember the affairs of the spirit" (92) and used Burns as an example of one failing in this. Burns then jumped on stage and recited Artaud's poem "Shit to the Spirit", at which point Marowitz too jumped on stage "crying, 'I commission you to write a play'" (92).

[32] In spite of writing numerous times and at quite reasonable depth about his appreciation of

B.S. Johnson and his work, Calder never quite manages to get the spelling of his name correct throughout *Pursuit* (2001). This is perhaps a case of Calder's hard-line stance towards presenting his memoirs "uncensored" leading him to refuse an editor as well. The same eccentric spelling also appears in Calder's introduction to *The Nouveau Roman Reader* (1986), suggesting he went at least twenty years without being corrected.

[33] At the time of writing, Giles Gordon's introduction preceding "The Unmapped Country" in *Beyond the Words* constitutes the evidence that it was Quin's final piece of writing. Further research into primary sources would be necessary to either contradict or fully validate his statement.

[34] The separation of lived life experiences from their material consequences that the drug experience imbues is interestingly mirrored in Quin's contribution to J.G. Ballard's literary magazine, *Ambit*. "Dr [Martin] Bax and I ran a competition... for the best prose or poetry written under the influence of drugs... the best of all the writing was done by Ann Quin, under the influence of the contraceptive pill" (Frick). Quin's framing of the Pill as something belonging with LSD, marijuana and amphetamines as part of the "drug culture" has interesting repercussions for the rest of her writing.

[35] Interestingly, this is something Brooke-Rose herself picks up on later, see "Remaking".

[36] There are numerous references to Pound in *Thru* and the simultaneity of Brooke-Rose's work would suggest that its influence would merit further academic study.

[37] Many of Brooke-Rose's novels rely on this ability to "explain themselves" in the blurb, a technique |

-=?DIQo?;£Áëó ! # + , - = E e f o
~ ? ? òçÛïÛïÛïç¼Ä¼ç¼çò±£~œ?yne]ynOhµhµµ5?>*[pic]CJaJ

hê
KCJaJhµµ>*[pic]CJaJhê
KhµµCJaJ

hÔfsCJaJhê
Khê
KCJaJhµhµµ>*[pic]CJaJh?L}5?>*[pic]CJaJhµh?L}5?>*[pic]CJaJhÜ 5?>*[pic]CJaJ

hÜ CJaJhÜ hÜ CJaJhµh-