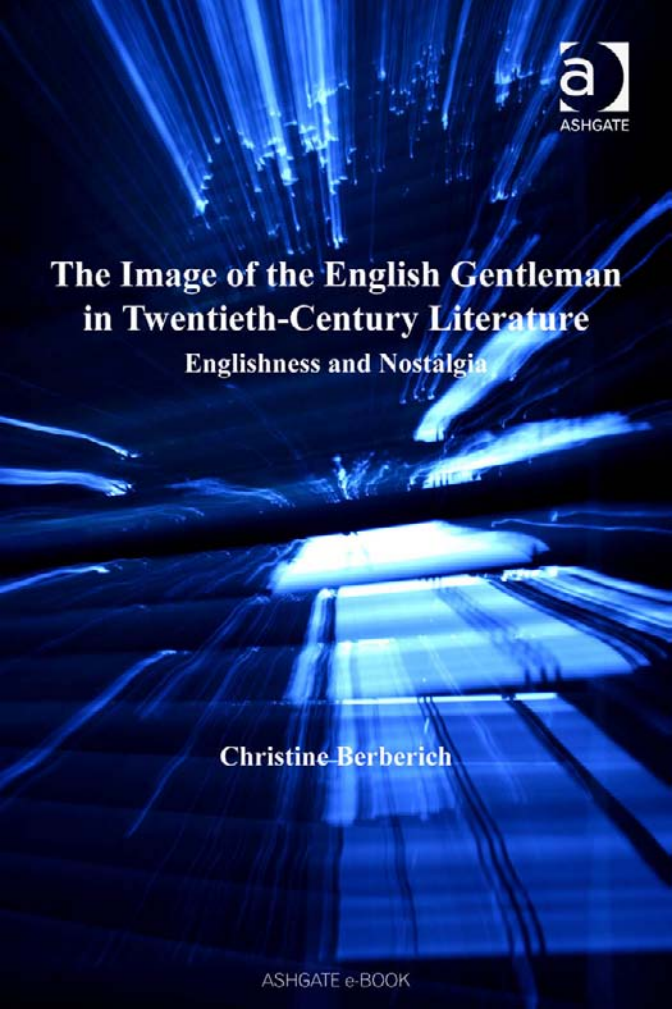
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The Image of the English Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature
Englishness and Nostalgia
Christine Berberich
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THE IMAGE OF THE ENGLISH GENTLEMAN IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERATURE

To
My Mother, 'Ruby',
who made it all possible

The Image of the English Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature

Englishness and Nostalgia

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ASHGATE

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Contents

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Christine Berberich,
Derbyshire, January 2007

List of Abbreviations

Texts by the key authors of this book will be referred to parenthetically with the following abbreviations throughout the text:

Boyd, William, *Any Human Heart*	***AHH***
Fowles, John, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*	***TFLW***
Hollinghurst, Alan, *The Swimming Pool Library*	***TSPL***
Ishiguro, Kazuo, *A Pale View of Hills*	***APVOH***
----, *An Artist of the Floating World*	***AOTFW***
----, *The Remains of the Day*	***TROTD***.
Powell, Anthony, *A Question of Upbringing*	***QU***
----, *A Buyer's Market*	***BM***
----, *The Acceptance World*	***AW***
----, *At Lady Molly's*	***LM***
----, *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant*	***CCR***
----, *The Kindly Ones*	***KO***
----, *The Valley of Bones*	***TVB***
----, *The Soldier's Art*	***SA***
----, *The Military Philosophers*	***MP***
----, *Books Do Furnish A Room*	***BDFR***
----, *Temporary Kings*	***TK***
----, *Hearing Secret Harmonies*	***HSH***
Sassoon, Siegfried, *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man*	***MFM***
----, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*	***MIO***
----, *Sherston's Progress*	***SP***
Waugh, Evelyn, *Decline and Fall*	***DAF***
----, *Vile Bodies*	***VB***
----, *Black Mischief*	***BM***
----, *A Handful of Dust*	***AHOD***
----, *Scoop*	***S***
----, *Put Out More Flags*	***POMF***
----, *Brideshead Revisited*	***BR***
----, *Men at Arms*	***MAA***
----, *Officers and Gentlemen*	***OAG***
----, *Unconditional Surrender*	***US***

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PART I
The Gentleman, Englishness and Nostalgia: Approaches, Explanations, Definitions

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Chapter 1

The Gentleman – An Elusive Term

Women and Children First

Gentleman – a word simultaneously conjuring up diverse images, yet one so difficult to define. When we hear the term, we might think of Englishness; of class; of masculinity; of elegant fashions; of manners and morals. But we might also think of hypocrisy; of repression; of outdated behaviour befitting the characters of a Victorian novel, but which no longer holds any value in today's society.

These conflicting images make it difficult to pinpoint the term 'gentleman' in a definition. But where words seem inadequate, deeds can speak more clearly. When, on 15 April 1912, the Titanic sank, many of her male passengers acted out what it meant for them to be gentlemen, by refusing seats in the few lifeboats. Dan Marvin was overheard calling to his new wife: '"It's all right, little girl … you go and I'll stay a while"'; '"Be brave; no matter what happens, be brave", Dr. W.T. Minahan entreated Mrs Minahan as he stepped back …'; Isidor Strauss declared that '"I will not go before the other men"'; the steel-heir Washington Augustus Roebling was last seen 'leaning against the rail, light[ing] a cigarette and wav[ing] good-bye' after helping several ladies into the boats; and the writer and editor William T. Stead 'retired to the first-class smoking room with a book'.[1] Particularly powerful are the following examples: Benjamin Guggenheim and his secretary gave away their lifebelts and 'now stood resplendent in evening clothes. "We've dressed in our best … and are prepared to go down like gentlemen"', eyewitnesses report them explaining. And Mr. Walter D. Douglas answered his wife's pleas to join her in a life-boat with only '"No … I must be a gentleman"', a sentence which summarized all his values.[2]

These men lived and, more poignantly, died according to the rules of an ideal which had been in existence in Britain for centuries. It had changed and been modified over the ages, but it was still going strong by the time the Titanic went down, and held values which were understood, followed and admired – albeit sometimes ridiculed as well – all over the world. This book sets out to investigate the term 'gentleman', and in particular its manifestations in the literature of the twentieth century.

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1 All quotations from Walter Lord, *A Night to Remember* (London, 1978), pp. 83; 85; 86; 103.

2 Both quotations from Lord, *A Night to Remember*, pp. 104; 83.

How to define the 'Undefinable'?

Before discussing presentations of the gentleman in literature, an attempt has to be made, if not to define, at least to *illustrate* the ideal. Shirley Robin Letwin writes that 'the "gentleman" conjures up images of frock coats, ancient vicarages, and well rolled lawns, of order and serenity'.[3] The term *gentleman* is highly ambiguous and amorphous, and consequently almost impossible to pinpoint. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Hazlitt wrote that 'what it is that constitutes the look of a gentleman is more easily felt than described. We all know it when we see it; but we do not know how to account for it'.[4] In 1856, a contributor to *Chamber's Journal* pondered on 'what a gentleman is supposed by different classes of people to be and not to be; how almost everybody has a particular and private account of him to give'.[5] Philip Mason echoed this in 1982: 'what was meant by this word [gentleman] is not at all easy to explain. It had different meanings in different mouths and the same person would use it in different senses.'[6] Daniel Johnston wrote in 1901 for the *Gentleman's Magazine* that 'the title of gentleman covers interpretations of a thousand shades, and is … conveniently vague …'.[7] In 1925, Karel Capek noted that 'what an English gentleman is cannot be stated concisely', and as late as 1965, Nikos Kazantzakis queried:

> "How can we define the gentleman?" I once asked one of the most perfect gentlemen of contemporary England, Sir Sidney Waterloo. "The gentleman," he answered me, "is he who feels himself at ease in the presence of everyone and everything, and who makes everyone and everything feel at ease in his presence." A correct definition, but how could it possibly include the whole indescribable atmosphere – the invisible, quivering tilting of the scale between ego-worship and nobility, between sensitivity and psychological control, between passion and discipline – of which the gentleman is molded. We catch an inkling of him from uncalculated, apparently insignificant details: a movement of the hand, a tone of voice, a kind of gait, a style of dressing, eating, amusement ... the cold invincible intensity with which he loves the countryside, sports, women, horses, *The Times*.[8]

Even the *Encyclopædia Britannica* in 1929 concluded that:

> the word "gentleman," used in the wide sense with which birth and circumstances have nothing to do, is necessarily incapable of strict definition. For "to behave like a gentleman" may mean little or much, according to the person by whom the phrase is used; "to spend money like a gentleman" may even be no great praise; but "to conduct a

3 Shirley Robin Letwin, 'Tradition II: The Morality of the Gentleman', *Cambridge Review* (7 May 1976): 142.

4 William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, Vol. 12: The Plain Speaker: Opinions on Books, Men and Things*, ed. P.P. Howe (London, 1912), p. 209.

5 Anonymous, 'What is a Gentleman', *Chamber's Journal* 5 (1856): 399.

6 Philip Mason, *The English Gentleman: The Rise and Fall of an Ideal* (London, 1993), p. 9.

7 Daniel Johnston, 'The Evolution of the Modern Gentleman', *Gentleman's Magazine* 291 (July to December 1901): 189.

8 Karel Capek, *Letters from England* (London, 1944), p. 172; Nikos Kazantzakis, *England* (Oxford, 1965), p. 174.

> business like a gentleman" implies a standard at least as high as that involved in the phrase *noblesse oblige*. In this sense of a person of culture, character and good manners the word "gentleman" has supplied a gap in more than one foreign language.[9]

In 1991 Hugh David elegantly circumvented even the attempt of defining the undefinable, by cunningly claiming that 'to have done so would have been unnecessarily reductive'.[10] This is an evasive but simultaneously important statement. The idea of the gentleman comprises so many values – from behaviour and morals to education, social background, the correct attire and table manners – that it would indeed be restrictive to limit it to just one brief, defining sentence. The beauty of the idea of the gentleman lies in the fact that it can be given an individual flavour to make it into a liveable ideal. The presentation of the gentleman in twentieth-century literature shows that it is up to the individual to take an abstract idea and turn it into an everyday reality.

Attempts at a definition are complicated by the fact that not only has the ideal changed considerably throughout the ages, but it is also always tinged with subjective impressions, which points to the problem of representation. As such, the term 'gentleman' shows similarities to that of other, related ambiguous terms: culture, Englishness, and class, of which David Cannadine writes that 'a Briton's place in this class hierarchy is also determined by ... ancestry, accent, education, deportment, mode of dress, patterns of recreation, type of housing and style of life. All these signs and signals help determine how any one individual regards him- (or her-) self, and how he (or she) is regarded and categorized by others'.[11] Similarly, if one asked ten passers-by on the street for definitions of the gentleman, it is likely that one would end up with ten different explanations – as *Chamber's Journal*'s anonymous contributor had already pointed out in 1856. The same writer also, with considerable irony, elaborates that 'when, therefore, we hear ourselves or others proclaimed to be "gentlemen" or "no gentlemen," we should consider, before being flattered or annoyed, who says it and what he or she is likely to mean'.[12] According to this mocking author, the 'term "gentleman" is mostly applied by the lower classes to those of their superiors who are most lavish and extravagant'.[13] This notion of mere flattery for personal gain is interesting, and certainly had historical precedent. Nowadays, many people react with discomfort when confronted with the term gentleman: it seems uncomfortably linked to class, images of feudal landlords or snobbish 'toffs', while simultaneously raising issues of education, style, manners, or simply inner values – ideas which seem, for many, incompatible.

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9 *Encyclopædia Britannica* 14th Edition (London, 1929), p. 123.

10 Hugh David, *Heroes, Mavericks and Bounders: The English Gentleman from Lord Curzon to James Bond* (London, 1991), p. xii.

11 David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven, CT, 1998), p. 22.

12 Anonymous, 'What is a Gentleman': 399.

13 Anonymous, 'What is a Gentleman': 399.

Commenting Characteristics

Characteristics of the gentleman can be commenting as well as defining ones. While defining characteristics should be sought, not only are the commenting ones more entertaining, but they often shed more light on the ideal's idiosyncrasies. Inevitably, there is a lot of overlap, since many commenting characteristics also include defining ones. The distinction here is between personal and official opinions: commenting characteristics have subjective touches, whereas the defining ones are primarily dedicated to dictionary and lexical entries.

Among the plethora of commenting characteristics, Surtees's claim that if you 'call for Burgundy with your cheese … they will know you are a gentleman' and Capek's declaration that 'only the English lawn and the English gentleman are shaved every day' must be among the most amusing, while Mason's cryptic comment that 'a gentleman is always a man in a mask' is the most enigmatic.[14] In the eighteenth century, Johnson still thundered that 'any other derivation of this difficult word than that which causes it to signify "a man of ancestry" is whimsical', but attitudes had already begun to change.[15] As early as 1714, Steele commented that 'the appellation of Gentleman is never to be affixed to a man's circumstances, but to his Behaviour in them'.[16] This attitude is most often echoed in literature, for example in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, or Italo Calvino's classic *The Baron in the Trees*, in which the hero, Cosimo, reprimands his father by claiming that 'a gentleman, my Lord Father, is such whether he is on earth or on the treetops … if he behaves with decency'.[17] Early in the nineteenth century Hazlitt commented that 'a gentleman is one who understands and eschews every mark of deference to the claims of self-love in others, and exacts it in return from them'.[18] John Stuart Mill wrote in 1851 that the term had gradually changed to include 'conduct, character, habits, and outward appearance …'.[19] In 1862, James Fitzjames Stephen described the gentleman as '[n]either a good man, [n]or a wise man, but a man socially pleasant …', and elaborated that 'it is ungentlemanlike to swear; that no man deserves to be called

14 Surtees, quoted in Mason, *The English Gentleman*, p. 104; Capek, *Letters from England*, p. 171; Mason, *The English Gentleman*, p. 8. Surtees's combination of gentlemanliness and food is a recurrent one. Most famous is Lord Curzon's statement at a dinner at Balliol College that 'No gentleman has soup at luncheon' (See Evelyn Waugh, 'An Open Letter to the Hon^{ble} Mrs Peter Rodd [Nancy Mitford] on a Very Serious Subject', in Nancy Mitford [et al.], *Noblesse Oblige: An Enquiry into the Identifiable Characteristics of the English Aristocracy* [London, 1956], p. 73). See also Philip Larkin's comment: 'A gentleman … never drinks the lees of his wine' (*Jill* [London, 1964], p. 13).

15 Dr. Johnson, quoted in Letwin, 'Tradition II': 141.

16 Richard Steele, '207: 5th August 1710', in *The Tatler, 3 Vols*, Vol. 3, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford, 1987), pp. 99–100.

17 Italo Calvino, *The Baron in the Trees* (London, 1959), p. 51.

18 Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, Vol. 12*, p. 217.

19 John Stuart Mill, *System of Logic* (London, 1884), quoted in Shirley Robin Letwin, 'The Idea of a Gentleman: Englishmen in Search of a Character', *Encounter* 57/5 (1981): 14.

a gentleman who would be guilty of the selfishness and treachery of seduction'.[20] D.A.L. Morgan quotes from the proceedings of an English court of law which stated that 'a gentleman is "a man who has no occupation"', an explanation which might lead to some confusion if applied today.[21] Cardinal Newman, in 1865, concluded that 'it is almost a definition of a gentleman to say he is one who never inflicts pain' and that 'he has too much good sense to be affronted at insults, … [is] too well employed to remember injuries, and too indolent to bear malice', a far remove from the swaggering, duelling gentleman of a century earlier.[22] W.R. Browne stated in 1886 that 'a gentleman is one to whom discourtesy is a sin and falsehood a crime', and 'one who, whether in great things or small, whether in things inward or things outward, tries to act up to the old precept, "Do unto others as you would they should do unto you"'.[23] H. Drummond affirms this: 'the word "gentleman" … means a gentle man – a man who does things gently, with love. … The gentle man cannot in the nature of things do an ungentle, an ungentlemanly thing.'[24] Or, as Oscar Wilde ironically put it, 'a gentleman never offends unintentionally'.[25] Harold Laski stated that 'the gentleman is, rather than does'; Odette Keun surmised that 'he is a creature who does not hurt your feelings unnecessarily'; Letwin claims that 'the gentleman is a revolutionary character who understands the value of tradition'; and Kazantzakis eventually reaches the verdict that 'you don't need great education or wealth or lineage in order to be a gentleman; a certain loftiness of character is all that is demanded, along with a relatively comfortable interval of time. And these the Englishman frequently finds accessible to him. Finds them, or *did find* them *in the past*?'[26] Kazantzakis's comments foreshadow the main question the twentieth century poses in regard to the gentleman: is the ideal dead, has the gentleman become superfluous, or does it (and he) still exist in today's society? And if so, in what form?

In *The British Aristocracy*, Mark Bence-Jones and Hugh Montgomery-Massingberd claim that 'the most illustrious noble of the realm values the name of gentleman above all his other titles'.[27] They proceed to list several clichés about

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20 James Fitzjames Stephen, 'Gentlemen', *Cornhill Magazine* 5 (1862): 331, 330.

21 D.A.L. Morgan, 'The Individual Style of the English Gentleman', in Michael Jones (ed.), *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Late Medieval Europe* (New York, 1986), p. 27.

22 John Henry Newman, 'A Definition of a Gentleman (1865)' (from: *The Idea of a University*), in *The Portable Victorian Reader*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (London, 1976), p. 467.

23 W.R. Browne, 'The English Gentleman', *The National Review* (April 1886): 261, 263.

24 H. Drummond, *The Greatest Thing in the World* (Leipzig, 1891), quoted in Heinz Poettgen, 'Die geschichtliche Entwicklung des *gentleman*-Ideals', *Die Neueren Sprachen* 2 (1952): 75–6.

25 Oscar Wilde, quoted in Mark Bence-Jones and Hugh Montgomery-Massingberd, *The British Aristocracy* (London, 1979), p. 2.

26 Harold Laski, *The Danger of Being a Gentleman and Other Essays* (London, 1939), p. 13; Odette Keun, *I Discover the English* (London, 1934), p. 12; Shirley Robin Letwin, 'Tradition II: The Morality of the Gentleman (concluded)', *Cambridge Review* (4 June 1976): 173; Kazantzakis, *England*, p. 90.

27 Bence-Jones and Montgomery-Massingberd, *The British Aristocracy*, p. 1.

the gentleman: 'a gentleman never causes or feels embarrassment in any situation', and 'a gentleman is a man in whose presence a woman feels herself to be a lady'.[28] Importantly, they point out that no man can be *made* a gentleman by a higher authority. The best-known supporter of this opinion is the oft-quoted King James I, whose reply to his old nurse's request to make her son a gentleman was 'I'll mak' your son a *baronet* gin ye like, Luckie, but the de'il himself coudna' mak' him a gentleman'.[29] Nevertheless, being or becoming a gentleman through *personal effort* is something that every man should aspire to. Bence-Jones and Montgomery-Massingberd point out that, rather than following a set of rules, 'behaving like a gentleman has always been more a matter of following the example of actual people than of conforming to an abstract code. … Starting with the sixteenth-century hero Sir Philip Sidney, the British have always had their prototypes of the perfect gentleman'.[30] Literature has, over the centuries, been a perfect vehicle to shape and perpetuate such prototypes.

Defining Characteristics

The defining characteristics of the term gentleman are almost as manifold and as contradictory as the commenting ones. The etymology of the term has been traced thoroughly. According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*:

> the word is formed of the French *gentilhomme*; or rather of *gentil*, "fine, fashionable, or becoming;" and the Saxon *man*, q.d. *honestus*, or *honesto loco natus* – The same signification has the Italian *gentilhuomo*, and the Spanish *hidalgo*, or *hijo dalgo*, that is, the son of somebody, or a person of note. – If we go farther back, we shall find *gentleman* originally derived from the Latin *gentiles homo*; which was used among the Romans for a race of noble persons.[31]

However, it is not the history of the word as such which causes the problem, it is an exact definition of it. A look into a thesaurus shows that there are no synonyms for the term itself, while, for its adjective, 'civil, civilized, courteous, cultivated, gallant, genteel, gentlemanlike, honourable, mannerly, noble, obliging, polished, polite, refined, reputable, suave, urbane, well-bred, well-mannered' are suggested.[32]

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28 Bence-Jones and Montgomery-Massingberd, *The British Aristocracy*, p. 2.

29 Letwin, 'The Idea of a Gentleman': 10. Bence-Jones and Montgomery-Massingberd emphasize this statement with a quote from Dion Boucicault's play *London Assurance* in which the character Sir Harcourt Courtly rebukes another character with: 'the title of gentleman is the only one *out* of any monarch's gift, yet within the reach of every peasant. It should be engrossed by *Truth* - stamped with *Honour* - sealed with *good-feeling* - signed *Man* - and enrolled in every true young English heart'. *The British Aristocracy*, p. 2.

30 Bence-Jones and Montgomery-Massingberd, *The British Aristocracy*, p. 19.

31 *Encyclopædia Britannica* 4th Edition (Edinburgh, 1810), p. 498. Here, it is interesting to note how the publishers advertised themselves and their work: 'Encyclopædia Britannica; or a Dictionary of Arts and Sciences … *By a society of Gentlemen in Scotland* [emphasis mine]'. See title-page of the Encyclopædia and entry in the British Library Catalogue. Learning, in the early nineteenth century, was still the prerogative of gentlemen.

32 *The Collins Paperback Thesaurus in A-to-Z Form* (Glasgow, 1984), p. 218.

None of those terms on their own can replace gentlemanly: it is only when they are combined that they fully illustrate the term.

The 1929 edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* describes the gentleman as 'in its original and strict signification, a term denoting a man of good family'.[33] But the *Encyclopædia* falters when it comes to a clear-cut definition; instead it attempts to explain changes in the term over the centuries. Whereas in the sixteenth century it was essential for a gentleman to have a coat of arms, the emphasis shifted in the eighteenth century to attitude and manners. The *Encyclopædia* states: 'The word "gentleman" as an index of rank had already become of doubtful value before the great political and social changes of the 19th century gave to it a wider and essentially higher significance.'[34] It then proceeds to list changes in definitions between earlier issues:

> In the fifth edition (1815) "a gentleman is one, who without any title, bears a coat of arms, or whose ancestors have been freemen." In the 7th edition (1845) it still implies a definite social status: "All above the rank of yeomen." In the 8th edition (1856) this is still its "most extended sense"; "in a more limited sense" it is defined in the same words as those quoted above from the 5th edition; but the writer adds, "By courtesy this title is generally accorded to all persons above the rank of common tradesmen when their manners are indicative of a certain amount of refinement and intelligence."[35]

'Refinement' and 'intelligence' are keywords here, as more men become eligible for the appellation. The *Encyclopædia* concludes that

> … the Reform Bill of 1832 has done its work; the "middle classes" have come into their own; and the word "gentleman" has come in common use to signify not a distinction of blood but a distinction of position, education and manners. The test is no longer good birth, or the right to bear arms, but the capacity to mingle on equal terms in good society. In its best use, moreover, "gentleman" involves a certain superior standard of conduct, due … to "that self-respect and intellectual refinement which manifest themselves in unrestrained yet delicate manners."[36]

This crucial quote highlights the increasing middle-class appropriation and adaptation of the term following the 1832 Reform Act.

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33 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 14th Edition (1929), p. 123.

34 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 14th Edition (1929), p. 124.

35 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 14th Edition (1929), p. 124.

36 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 14th Edition (1929), pp. 124–5. Interestingly, a keyword search for *gentleman* in the online version of the latest *Encyclopædia Britannica* does not come up with any definition of the term. In fact, it has no listing under gentleman at all. Instead, it lists related terms such as 'Gentleman Jim (American boxer)', 'Gentleman's Magazine', 'Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod', 'Two Gentlemen of Verona', 'Gentleman's Agreement', 'A Gentleman Friend', 'Gentleman's Relish', 'Gentleman Film International' etc. See http://www.britannica.com. This could be interpreted as showing that the term gentleman on its own seems no longer to be regarded as important in contemporary society. As for the *Encyclopædia*, it is no longer in the hands of 'a Society of Gentlemen in Scotland', but of an American publisher.

Finally, *The Oxford Paperback Dictionary* gives four different definitions: '1. a man of honourable and kindly behaviour. 2. a man of good social position. 3. (in polite use) a man. 4. *the Gentlemen's*, a man's public lavatory.'[37] The emphasis lies with the first definition, and thereby on *behaviour*. In fact, the dictionary no longer considers ancestry relevant. This – but especially so the appropriation of the term to denote a public convenience – shows how much it has now been assimilated into everyday usage far removed from its original meaning.

'Every Man for Himself'

Let us briefly return to the fateful night of 15 April 1912. The men on board the Titanic had no need – nor, if one wanted to be sarcastic, did they have the time – to define the term gentleman. Their deeds spoke more than words: although – or possibly because? – their lives were at stake, they did the honourable thing. It was only after he had ensured that everything possible had been done for the women and children aboard that Captain Smith gave the signal to his men to abandon ship: '"You've done your *duty*, boys. Now, every man for himself."'[38] *Duty* here is my emphasis, and points at one of the keywords for every (prospective) gentleman: duty before personal interest, the good of the group (read: society) before that of the individual.

However, the gentlemen of the Titanic highlight one problem which needs to be addressed: the reliability of eye-witness accounts and the related problem of myth creation. It is tempting, and one could almost say comforting, to believe that the men aboard the Titanic really *did* behave like gentlemen. But one has to be cautious. The sinking of the 'unsinkable' Titanic achieved mythical status almost immediately, and the reports about the male passengers' alleged gentlemanliness point to the problem of reliability of representation. By the early twentieth century, traditional gentlemanly ideals were considered to be in decline: commerce was outweighing culture, business acumen more important than polished manners. The Titanic eye-witness accounts *might* consequently be an over-elaboration, possibly aimed at boosting a fading ideal. They might also have been the result of wishful thinking – surely it would be a comfort to know that men behaved in such an heroic manner in a time of crisis?[39] These possibilities have to be borne in mind. After all, it is a well-

37 *The Oxford Paperback Dictionary*, 2nd Edition (Oxford, 1983), p. 269.

38 Lord, *A Night to Remember*, p. 109.

39 A similar myth was created with the death of Scott of Antarctica and his fellow explorers, in particular Captain Oates whose epitaph on the cairn erected for him in the Antarctic reads 'Hereabouts died a very gallant gentleman, Captain L.E.G. Oates of the Inniskilling Dragoons. In March 1912, returning from the Pole, he walked willingly to his death in a blizzard, to try and save his comrades, beset by hardships' (see the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, Second Edition [Oxford, 1981], p. 10). It is worth noting that a popular and critically acclaimed novelist like Beryl Bainbridge has dedicated two of her novels to those popular myths surrounding the figure of the gentleman: Scott and Captain Oates, and the men of the Titanic. See *The Birthday Boys* (London, 1993) and *Every Man for Himself* (London, 1997).

known fact that there *were* men on board who literally threw their values *over*board in their scramble for the life-boats. The most prominent example was Bruce Ismay, Managing Director of the White Star Line, commonly held responsible for dictating the Titanic's fatal speed. Ismay managed to get into Boat C. According to Lord's book, public opinion immediately swung against him, and Ismay himself was aware of his 'ungentlemanly' behaviour, retiring to Ireland where he lived in seclusion until his death in 1937.[40] When reading Lord's account of the sinking of the Titanic, one consequently has to be aware that the eyewitness-accounts ought not to be trusted implicitly. But one also has to recognize that the men aboard the Titanic would have known what society expected of them: to sacrifice their lives for those of the more vulnerable passengers. This did not necessarily have to do with being a *gentle*man, but quite simply a *man*: men were traditionally expected by society to fight and protect the weaker members of society. In going against the expectations *of* society, the men aboard the Titanic knew that they risked their position *in* it.

Since 1912 Captain Smith's 'every man for himself' has taken on a different meaning: it now appears to come *before* doing one's duty. David ponders that the gentleman's traditional attributes, of 'style … honour, manners and the possession of the famous stiff upper lip … are seemingly in equally short supply in today's aggressively "go-getting," nominally egalitarian, meritocratic, post-monetarist society'.[41] Similarly, Clive Aslett laments that

> I was brought up to believe that tradition to some extent governed behaviour. … One was encouraged to behave like a gentleman. It was thought a good thing that children should give up their seats on buses and trains. There seemed to be less emphasis on winning a match or a game than on avoiding conceit when having done so. … It was always encouraged that a boy would put other people's interest over his own, and that the individual would give precedence to the group. Chivalry had not entirely perished. … The code of honour of a nineteenth-century gentleman was not regarded as wholly laughable. We had modernism in architecture, modernism in the freedom of sexual relations, but modernism in ethical values had yet to arrive. Now it has.[42]

Scopes and Aims

The scope of this book does not allow for a detailed historical and sociological analysis of whether or not the gentleman, or, more precisely, gentlemanly behaviour has indeed declined so much. What it aims to do instead is to take a closer look at four representative creative writers of the twentieth century, and to show how they deal with the problems posed by literary presentations of the gentleman.

The starting point for the discussion is Robin Gilmour's 1981 comment that 'the gentleman has faded from the literary landscape because he has been absorbed by

40 See Lord, *A Night to Remember*, pp. 131, 172.

41 David, *Heroes, Mavericks and Bounders*, p. xi.

42 Clive Aslett, *Anyone for England: A Search for British Identity* (London, 1997), pp. 156–7.

democracy without being resurrected, as the aristocrat has been, into myth'.[43] It is the main aim of this book to contradict this statement and to show that the gentleman is still alive and well as a literary trope. Although Gilmour and many of his colleagues argue that the gentleman has more or less disappeared from literature and public interest since the Great War, I will argue that he has continued to be a prominent trope in twentieth-century writing, albeit in ever-changing manner.

The following chapter will first provide a brief history of the development of the gentleman, before delineating the keywords of the ensuing discussion: Englishness and nostalgia. The term 'gentleman' is not only generally used in conjunction with the adjective *English*, but *gentleman* has come to be appropriated as a symbol for quintessential Englishness. Because of its revered status, references to the gentleman are often made in a nostalgic manner, praising something which appears to be lost; something which existed in a past whose values were better than those of contemporary society. Because of this trend, there is the danger of closing one's eyes to the potential pitfalls of a revered ideal.

Chapter 3 will briefly outline the history of the gentleman in literature, paying special attention to nineteenth- and twentieth-century developments. The second section of the chapter will then highlight the theoretical approaches which will be used in the literary discussion which follows in Part Two of the book. In order to understand the individual authors' viewpoints, sociological, cultural and historical perspectives will have to be considered. In the process, Foucault's discourses on power, deconstruction and aspects of gender studies will be taken into consideration.

The four authors whose work will be examined in detail – Siegfried Sassoon, Anthony Powell, Evelyn Waugh and Kazuo Ishiguro – are all concerned with interpretations of gentlemanly values. Depictions of the gentleman in literature often follow a similar pattern and are frequently concerned with similar values – honesty, dignity, loyalty, a sense of duty, good manners. As such, they adhere to a narratological pattern which builds upon universally shared and understood values and ideas, but uses them for different means. The ensuing gentlemanly discourse of the individual novels, and consequently 'his' literary function, have changed over the years. While certain authors deploy the figure of the gentleman in order to depict their social nostalgia for a time gone by, others use him to deconstruct the myths surrounding him, or to reflect changes in society. The fact that some authors use the trope of the gentleman to regress into nostalgia, while others react to it in order to make it more acceptable to contemporary readerships, highlights the importance of looking at individual novels not in isolation, but within their social, cultural and historical frameworks. This is of particular importance in the twentieth century, with its radically changing literary and critical trends.

There were various factors which led to the choice of these particular four authors. Sassoon is an important representative of the generation of the Great War. Because Sassoon was himself one of those young men whose ideals were allegedly ruined by the trench experience, his *Memoirs of George Sherston* are not only evocative war-memoirs, but are also concerned with how a typical young English gentleman

43 Gilmour, Robin, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (London, 1981), p. 184.

of his time dealt with the horrors of war and their effects on his gentlemanly outlook on life. Furthermore, it is interesting to explore how Sassoon's work is typical of, or contrasts with, that of his modernist contemporaries. The authors Anthony Powell and Evelyn Waugh were both chosen because they published prodigiously during the twentieth century, and their writing careers spanned well over half of the century. Both authors had the reputation of being reactionary and snobbish, and of dealing with only a very small elitist social circle. While it is tempting to investigate (and possibly to contradict) these accusations, it will be more important to find out whether their outlook on society changed during their long careers. Powell in particular is a fascinating author in that respect, since his main work, the epic twelve-volume *A Dance to the Music of Time*, not only spans three decades, but also took as long to complete. Attention will have to be paid to the competing literary trends of the time, in particular the 'Angry Young Men' movement, which painted a bleaker picture of contemporary society than Powell's or Waugh's evocation of society's 'Bright Young Things'. The chapters will have to query what the authors wanted to achieve with their particular pictures of society. Finally, Kazuo Ishiguro is an author who brings not one, but three different perspectives to the topic: as a contemporary author, he is dealing with different issues in his depiction of the gentleman; as a Japanese-born writer, he brings a fresh attitude to the British class system, and to that so very English institution of the gentleman. And lastly, having a servant as his protagonist, he contributes yet another perspective, from below, that of the servant quarters, rather than of the social insider. Ishiguro's novel is also written with historical hindsight.

The book will then conclude with a brief look at three more contemporary texts, and at the different gentlemanly discourses they apply: John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, with its three different endings, brings a postmodern aspect to the topic of the gentleman; Alan Hollinghurst's *The Swimming-Pool Library* combines the discourse of the gentleman with the history of homoerotic writing; and William Boyd's *Any Human Heart* elegantly recreates a world not only echoing that of Waugh and Powell, but introducing a protagonist who even claims their acquaintance.

In summary, this book will outline how twentieth-century authors turn the ideal of the gentleman from the universal truth it was considered to be in the nineteenth century to a more personal one, each of them approaching it according to their own preferences.

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Chapter 2

From Knight to Public-School Boy – Following the Gentleman through the Ages

The Historical Development of the Gentleman

It is difficult to find a proper starting point for the development of the gentleman. In our modern understanding of the ideal (as conceived primarily from the nineteenth century), the mediaeval knight, with his code of moral conduct, courteous behaviour to women and fair play to defeated foes in battle, can be considered the forerunner.[1]

The term 'gentleman' was first used in 1413 when, as George Sitwell explains, 'we begin to meet in the public records with husbandmen, yeomen, and occasionally with a franklin or gentleman, but it was long before the new fashion of calling oneself a gentleman came into general use'.[2] By the sixteenth century, it *had* come into general use. Shakespeare's motto 'All the world's a stage' never rang more true; the Renaissance was the era of men's self-fashioning. Stephen Greenblatt claims that 'in sixteenth century England there were both selves and a sense that they could be fashioned. … there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process ...'.[3] Appearance – not merely physical – was everything. With the introduction of new weapons and battle techniques, the knight had become redundant and needed a new livelihood. Men now required manners, knowledge and flourish to impress at court, the epicentre of Renaissance society. To be able to take part in the shaping of a new society, they needed a thoroughly revised education: Renaissance humanism found its beginnings. The new educational ideals were first published by the Spanish scholar Vives, a member of the Oxford group surrounding Erasmus and Sir Thomas More.[4] The aim of this group was to introduce Italian reconsiderations of the classical past

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1 Frequent chivalric revivals, for example in the Elizabethan era and in the nineteenth century, here especially the spectacular summer entertainments organized for Elizabeth I in 1566, or the Eglinton Tournament of 1839 can be taken as evidence for that. For an admirable description of the origins of the gentleman in the Middle Ages, see Maurice Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman: Heraldry, Chivalry and Gentility in Medieval England, c.1300–c.1500* (Stroud, 2002).

2 George Sitwell, 'The English Gentleman', *The Ancestor* 1 (April 1902): 73.

3 Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago, 1980), p. 1.

4 For Vives' work and ideas, see Ruth Kelso, *The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century, with a Biographical List of Treatises on the Gentleman and Related Subjects Published in Europe to 1625* (Gloucester, MA, 1964), p. 117.

into England: knights and scholars were turned into philosopher statesmen and orators, the latter based on the Ciceronian ideal. Aspiring young gentlemen had to become proficient in a variety of subjects, ranging from rhetoric and logic, to history, philosophy, poetry, theology and civil law, and also mathematics, astronomy, cosmography and foreign languages. James Cleland, for example, hoped to '"make the young gentleman universal … that all the world may be his book"'.[5] Humanists wanted to use rhetoric to 'make men capable of communicating political and ethical truths so persuasively that they would thereby reform and civilize society'.[6] New horizons opened up as social hierarchies began to change: the keyword was personal efficiency, or at least persuasiveness. This distinction is crucial, as emphasis was indeed put on the fact that a man need not necessarily have to *be* meritorious, but merely to *appear* so.

The idea of self-fashioning will be referred to throughout this book (albeit divorced from Greenblatt's Renaissance background) and applied to twentieth-century authors. The self-*fashioned* man is similar to the self-*made* man. A self-fashioned (gentle)man knowingly models himself according to certain behavioural rules; a self-made man builds up a career, business or fortune out of nothing. There is of necessity an overlap between the two, both consciously and subconsciously.

Renaissance civic humanism was an immensely practical and very English form of humanism: men were eager to apply the lessons newly learnt from literature, history and moral philosophy to real life. In the process, a new publishing trend was born: conduct books were the first works aimed primarily at improving their readers' minds, behaviour and thus life in general. In later years, the conduct book changed into the courtesy book and, from there, into the etiquette book, still particularly popular in the nineteenth century. One of the earliest influences was Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* of 1528. Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Boke Named the Governour* of 1531, for example, was vastly indebted to it. The main distinction between the two books is the emphasis on different virtues. For Castiglione, grace – his beautifully termed *sprezzatura* – is of utmost importance. Elyot stresses moral qualities, and consequently his work lacks the playful tone of Castiglione's. Kelso explains the difference between 'Courtier' and 'Governour': 'The Italian courtier at his best ... was a man fitted to conquer in war, to adorn a court, and to give wise counsel to his prince, but he was chiefly interested in the court as a place where he might achieve personal perfection and make his perfection known. ... In England … these very offices were considered the happiest business of the courtier'.[7] Castiglione's *Courtier* was trend-setting: it was the first book dedicated solely to the personal improvement of the individual, and as such not only ancestor to the many courtesy and etiquette books which were to follow in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but, as Mason explains, in itself 'part of the pedigree of the English gentleman'.[8]

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5 Kelso, *The Doctrine of the English Gentleman*, p. 121.

6 Daniel Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England* (Princeton, NJ, 1978), p. 23.

7 Kelso, *The Doctrine of the English Gentleman*, pp. 51–2.

8 Philip Mason, *The English Gentleman: The Rise and Fall of an Ideal* (London, 1993), p. 52.

Some of the keywords connected with gentlemanly behaviour which have already been flagged up – conduct, courtesy, etiquette – can be summarized under the heading 'Manners'. While the Renaissance gentleman still put emphasis on family background and a general ability to make a good impression, manners were soon to become the key signifier of gentlemanliness. In 1780, Edmund Burke wrote that 'manners are of more importance than laws ... they aid morals, they supply them, or they totally destroy them'.[9] The Fourth Earl of Chesterfield advised his son to use 'not [only] … bare common civility; … but [also] … engaging, insinuating, shining manners; distinguished politeness, an almost irresistible address; a superior gracefulness in all you say and do', which recalls Castiglione's *sprezzatura*.[10] Lionel Trilling summarizes manners as:

> a culture's hum and buzz of implication ... the whole evanescent context in which its explicit statements are made. It is that part of a culture which is made up of half-uttered or unuttered or unutterable expressions of value. They are hinted at by small actions, sometimes by the arts of dress or decoration, sometimes by tone, gesture, emphasis, or rhythm, sometimes by the words that are used with a special frequency or a special meaning.[11]

He summarizes that 'in any complex culture there is … a conflicting variety of manners', while Bryson concludes that 'manners ... might be defined not just as a set of social rules, but as the rules which define the end-product of socialization'.[12] Manners have changed considerably over time. While chivalry and its behavioural codes were a product of the Middle Ages, they were soon replaced by courtesy, civility, politeness and etiquette. According to Michael Curtin:

> The literary vehicle for the discussion of manners was the courtesy book, a genre that for almost three hundred years, from Elyot to Chesterfield, remained a lively and important strand of English literature. While including discussions of the minor formulations of etiquette, courtesy literature was certainly not limited to these. A variety of different subjects might be examined, but typically the genre concerned itself with the advocacy of ideals of character, accomplishments, habits, manners, and morals – in short, the art of living in society.[13]

Courtesy still had a connection with the mediaeval knight but, as Bryson explains, 'the gradual supersession of the term "courtesy" by the term "civility" in early modern writing on manners indicates a "bourgeoisification" of codes of conduct', culminating in the elevation of manners to quasi-religious status for the Victorian

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9 Edmund Burke, quoted in Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1998), p. 43.

10 Philip Dormer Stanhope, fourth Earl of Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son*, quoted in John E. Mason, *Gentlefolk in the Making* (New York, 1971), p. 286.

11 Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 194–5.

12 Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination*, p. 195; Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, p. 9.

13 Michael Curtin, 'A Question of Manners: Status and Gender in Etiquette and Courtesy', *Journal of Modern History* 57 (1985): 395.

middle classes.[14] Both courtesy books – most popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and aimed at a primarily upper-class male audience – and nineteenth-century etiquette books – targeting a new middle-class audience – were written with the aim of self-fashioning. The nineteenth-century etiquette book eventually helped middle-class men to emulate the manners of those who had run the country before them, by providing them with set rules of behaviour which allowed them to take on their increasingly influential role in society.

Despite this preoccupation with the gentleman in earlier centuries, it was the nineteenth which saw the heyday of the ideal – and various changing phases of it. Mason writes that 'the Victorians inherited the idea of the gentleman. They added to it, they developed it; they set up factories for gentlemen in their public schools'.[15] In the early eighteenth century, Steele defined the gentleman as a 'man compleatly qualify'd as well for the Service and Good, as for the Ornament and Delight, of Society', but admitted that such a paragon of human virtue was so rare that 'a finished Gentleman is perhaps the most uncommon of all the great Characters in Life'.[16] In contrast to many of his contemporaries, Steele did not automatically equate the gentleman with the nobility or gentry, thus pointing towards new developments: the emerging middle classes and their adoption and adaptation of the term.

Many more things could find mention here: the Grand Tour every young gentleman was expected to undertake in order to further his education; the development of the club society in London; the scandalous behaviour of the Restoration Rake. It was in particular the goings-on of those hell-raisers which gave cause for fundamental change in the early nineteenth century, when the solemn Evangelicals used it as the focal point for their successful bid to improve society. A man of character, in their opinion, should not recklessly flaunt his worldly goods or gallivant around town. They called for austerity in appearance *and* severity in behaviour, claiming that a 'sincere appearance was, like conduct, defined most importantly as a visible manifestation of a well-ordered, morally consistent inner self'.[17]

The reform movement could not have been so successful without the aid of other factors – especially economic ones. Because of the long peace, commerce and industry expanded unhindered, and with the increase in business came a steady expansion of the middle class. Leslie Stephen explains:

> What had since happened had been the growth of a great comfortable middle-class … the professional men, the lawyers, clergymen, physicians, and merchants who had been enriched by the growth of commerce and manufactures; the country gentlemen whose rents had risen, and who could come to London and rub off their old rusticity. The aristocracy is still in possession of great wealth and political power, but beneath it has grown up an

14 Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, p. 58.

15 Mason, *The English Gentleman*, p. 13.

16 Richard Steele, '20 April 1713', in *The Guardian* 34, quoted in John Barrell, *English Literature in History 1730–80: An Equal Wide Survey* (London, 1983), p. 37.

17 Marjorie Morgan, *Manners, Morals and Class in England 1774–1858* (London, 1994), p. 73.

> independent society which is already beginning to be the most important social stratum and the chief factor in political and social development.[18]

The old class system did not change dramatically, but it became increasingly easy to leap over class barriers. The middle classes, though keen to establish their own cultural identity, ultimately aspired to join the ranks of the upper classes. This upward orientation meant that Britain, unlike most of Europe at the time, did not see any revolutionary attempts to overthrow the old order; Cromwell's assumption of power in 1653 had been the last notable, though ultimately short-lived, attempt.[19] Nevertheless, the French Revolution of 1789 left the British upper classes uneasy. The early nineteenth century saw some unnecessarily harsh reactions by those in power to manifestations of public discontent. A demonstration in 1819 on Manchester's St. Peter's Field notoriously entered the history books as the Peterloo Massacre. The undue violence with which this harmless gathering was subdued is indicative of how wary the ruling classes were of anything that smacked of revolution, however remotely. The middle classes, however, did not want to overthrow the social order; they aimed at reform. The three Reform Acts, of 1832, 1867 and 1884–85 respectively, gave increasing, especially electoral, privileges, from which the middle classes profited most.

For middle-class men, the appellation 'gentleman' was the ultimate benchmark. Curtin importantly points out that 'those who wanted to learn aristocratic manners perceived the task not as a craven capitulation to a class enemy but as a worthy emulation of high standards. Aristocratic manners did not appear to contradict economic success but rather to crown it with the diadem of high culture'.[20] Asa Briggs explains that the idea of the gentleman was 'the necessary link in any analysis of Victorian ways of thinking and behaving. … For the moral component of gentlemanliness, and its social ambiguity, made it both open to debate and open to invasion, in a way that the aristocracy was not. The problem was to widen the basis of qualification, without sacrificing the exclusiveness which was the source of its esteem'.[21] Wealth instead of birth helped, as it could buy, if not the manners, then at least the trappings of a gentlemanly lifestyle. First-generation industrialists and

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18 Leslie Stephen, *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1920), pp. 192–3.

19 For further evidence and support of this thesis see, for example, Mason, *The English Gentleman*, pp. 9–14; Morgan, *Manners, Morals and Class*, pp. 91–5; Curtin, 'A Question of Manners': 413; and Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (London, 1992), pp. 158, 162ff. This attitude was also shared by George Orwell, who wrote in 1947 that 'there is no revolutionary tradition in England. … The masses still more or less assume that "against the law" is a synonym for "wrong"'. (George Orwell, *The English People*, in *Orwell's England*, ed. Peter Davison [London, 2001], p. 294.)

20 Curtin, 'A Question of Manners': 413.

21 Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement* (London, 1959), quoted in Neil McKendrick, '"Gentleman and Player" Revisited: the Gentlemanly Ideal, the Business Ideal and the Professional Ideal in English Literary Culture', in Neil McKendrick and R.B. Outhwaite (eds), *Business Life and Public Policy: Essays in Honour of D.C. Coleman* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 116.

businessmen aspired to selling up shop, setting up new homes in the country and sending their sons to Eton and Oxbridge, in order to assure them of the gentlemanly upbringing which they themselves had been denied. The ultimate aim was the merging of their family with an established upper-class one, with its consequent social elevation. The aristocracy accepted these changes. Among themselves, they might belittle the coarse manners of the up-and-coming industrialist – but they did not hesitate to marry their sons and daughters off to the children of just these 'upstarts' in order to preserve their estates. Morgan remarks that 'the English aristocracy believed that the most effective way to control potentially threatening, antagonistic groups was to absorb them, being sure to impose on all newcomers aristocratic standards and manners'.[22] Bertrand Russell later sardonically commented that 'the concept of the gentleman was invented by the aristocrats to keep the middle classes in order', a comment echoed in the 1950s by the Angry Young Man John Wain: 'In England there is a time-honoured method of dealing with opposition. First of all, you try to squash it; then, if it refuses to be squashed, you institutionalize it.'[23]

In the Victorian era, the term gentleman was used in two senses. Mason explains:

> It might be a social label, indicating some degree of distinction above the lowest rung of society. Even within that sense … it carried very wide variations when used by different people … But there was a second meaning, also carrying many different shades of significance in different mouths and at different times, but always suggesting certain standards of behaviour.[24]

Mason's second meaning points to the distinction between the 'gentleman of birth' and 'nature's gentleman'. The latter was deemed to be devoid of class connotations: *everyman* could aspire to it, provided he adhered to the set code of manners advocating honour, charity and social responsibility.

The nineteenth-century gentleman shows two different stages of development. While the first few decades of the century were dominated by the austere, deeply religious Evangelical gentleman who was at heart a family man, new developments soon usurped him. After decades of having been educated at home and on the Grand Tour, boys and young men were now increasingly sent to the newly formed or *re*formed public schools.[25] In Eton, Rugby, Harrow and a steadily increasing number of public schools, boys learnt above all else to be men; to grow muscles and to fight

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22 Morgan, *Manners, Morals and Class in England*, p. 27.

23 Bertrand Russell, quoted in Robin Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (London, 1981), p. 5; John Wain, in Robert Hewison, *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War 1945–60* (London, 1981), p. 174.

24 Mason, *The English Gentleman*, p. 16.

25 Dr. Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby from 1828–42, is considered the father of English public-school reform. He put a renewed emphasis on classical learning and especially religion, striving to make not merely gentlemen, but *Christian* gentlemen out of his young charges. Character-building was considered more important than mere scholarly instruction. Arnold is quoted to have said that 'a thorough English Gentleman – Christian, manly, and enlightened … is a finer specimen of human nature than any other country, I believe, could furnish' (see Heinz Poettgen, 'Die geschichtliche Entwicklung des *gentleman*-Ideals', *Die*

for their rightful place. A new creed was celebrated: manliness. Rugby and soccer replaced allegedly effeminate subjects such as French. Manliness, Norman Vance summarizes, 'brings with it connotations of physical and moral courage and strength and vigorous maturity. ... The manly man may be patriotic, generous, broad-minded, decent, chivalrous and freespirited by turns'.[26] J.A. Mangan defines it as embracing 'antithetical values – success, aggression and ruthlessness, yet victory within the rules, courtesy in triumph, compassion for the defeated'.[27] Tosh concludes:

> Manliness expresses perfectly the important truth that boys do not become men just by growing up but by acquiring a variety of manly qualities and manly competencies as part of a conscious process. ... [Men] must live by a code which affirms their masculinity. As such a code, Victorian manliness was not only taken very seriously by pundits and preachers; it was also manifested in the lives of countless young men, who saw it as an expression of their manhood in keeping with their religious convictions, their social aspirations, or both together.[28]

Manliness was thus achieved through a conscious process similar to Greenblatt's notions of self-fashioning. Girouard confirms that:

> the chivalrous gentleman was not an accident; he had been deliberately created. The aim of Digby, Carlisle, FitzGerald, Kingsley and others had been to produce a new model for the ruling classes, to train, in fact, an elite … in conscious reaction to certain features of their own age which they disliked, especially the increase of democracy … the worship of money, and the placing of expediency before principle. ... The aim of the revival of the chivalric tradition was to produce a ruling class which deserved to rule because it possessed the moral qualities necessary to rulers. Gentlemen were to run the country because they were morally superior.[29]

It can consequently be argued that, in the nineteenth century, the idea of the gentleman was developed into an 'invented tradition': based on the mediaeval cult of the knight, it was adapted and modified to fit contemporary needs. The public schools then institutionalized this new ideal.[30] The Victorian gentleman-to-be consciously had to submit to and fashion himself according to a set of rules; without these, society would not be able to consider him a gentleman.

Neueren Sprachen 2 [1952]: 77). Even though Arnold was not opposed to sports for character-building, the later cult of athleticism was not his intention.

26 Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 8.

27 J.A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 135.

28 John Tosh, 'What Should Historians Do With Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth Century Britain', *The History Workshop Journal* 38 (1994): 181.

29 Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven, CT, 1981), pp. 260–1.

30 For the idea of invented traditions see Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 1–14.

Victorian ideas of manliness changed again in the second half of the century. Joe Maguire elaborates that 'although adherence to a "manly" code was widespread, significantly different interpretations existed. There was no one common code but rather competing codes of conduct which reinforced and reflected the structure of British society'.[31] Mangan and Walvin point out the two dominant traits of Victorian manliness:

> To the early Victorian it represented a concern with a successful transition from Christian immaturity to maturity, demonstrated by earnestness, selflessness and integrity, to the late Victorian it stood for neo-Spartan virility as exemplified by stoicism, hardiness and endurance – the pre-eminent qualities of the famous English public school system.[32]

The concept of Muscular Christianity was born.

It could be said that the Victorian public school counteracted the original idea of the gentleman's education. In the Etons, Harrows and Rugbys of, in particular, the second half of the nineteenth century, the stress was no longer on educating refined gentlemen, but hardened empire-builders who could deal with any situation without showing emotions. Etiquette books became superfluous as men followed a new code of behaviour – namely that of 'playing the game' with a 'stiff upper lip'. The notion of self-fashioning still applied; but the focus had shifted to the tough adventurer ready to conquer new worlds for Queen and Country.

This inevitably led to yet another trend: a homosocial, exclusively male world which caused changes in domesticity. Economic factors again played their part: as the century advanced, it became increasingly important for a man to be financially secure before contemplating marriage. And the longer men remained bachelors, the more they got used to male-only society revolving around school, gentlemen's clubs, sporting associations and the hunting season. This trend is reflected in literature: homoerotic writing cannot be ignored when it comes to literary representations of the gentleman. Having retreated into their own homosocial universe, Victorian men considered the growing Empire their rightful playground. The Victorian gentleman, builder of the biggest empire the world had ever seen, was a Romantic at heart, deeply embedded in rose-tinted mediaeval notions of chivalry and knight-errantry. Did not Charles Kingsley, one of the 'fathers' of the notion of muscular Christianity, declare in a sermon of 1865 that 'the age of chivalry is never past as long as there is a wrong left unredressed on earth, or a man or a woman left to say "I will redress that wrong, or spend my life in the attempt"'?[33] Girouard writes that:

> by the end of the nineteenth century a gentleman had to be chivalrous ... brave, straightforward and honourable, loyal to his monarch, country and friends, unfailingly true to his word, ready to take issue with anyone he saw ill-treating a woman, a child or

31 Joe Maguire, 'Images of Manliness and Competing Ways of Living in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain', *British Journal of Sports History* 3 (1986): 265.

32 J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, 'Introduction', in J.A. Mangan and James Walvin (eds), *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800–1940* (Manchester, 1987), p. 1.

33 Charles Kingsley, quoted in Girouard, *The Return to Camelot*, p. 130.

> an animal. He was a natural leader of men, and others unhesitatingly followed his lead. He was fearless in war and on the hunting field, and excelled at all manly sports; but, however tough with the tough, he was invariably gentle to the weak; above all he was always tender, respectful and courteous to women… [34]

Victorian gentlemen have often been described as uniform characters, prone to rigidity and inflexibility. Their almost identical, uniform-like apparel – dark, drab colours, stiff, high collars, top-hat – has only added to their image as over-moral, stiff-upper-lipped characters, preoccupied with class issues and Empire building, and indisposed to change. Because of this cliché, it is often overlooked that the Victorian era itself was full of changes – and the image of the gentleman no less so. No one decade had precisely the same conceptions as the previous one – which contributes to the difficulty in defining the term.

Was it the Great War that shook the English gentleman unpleasantly from his imperial and chivalric reverie? In the trenches of Flanders he might have realized that skills learned on the playing fields of Eton did not help him win or survive the war; neither did his ingrained notion of fair play. But does the First World War really mark the metaphorical death of the English gentleman? Or did he merely grow up, from eternal boyhood into responsible manhood? The twentieth century changed perspectives and priorities. Two world wars and an increasing number of ever worse atrocities showed that the emphasis had shifted from manners and morals to battles for power. The image of the gentleman was increasingly used for nostalgic regression, in a concerted effort to look at the past through rose-tinted glasses. At the same time, however, there were attempts to react against this, and to liberate the ideal of the gentleman from its iconic and mythical position, in order to adapt it to the challenges of the new century.

Englishness and Nostalgia: the Case of the English Gentleman

Englishness is a topic which has achieved considerable prominence over the last few years. In the face of Welsh and Scottish Devolution, the English have had to rethink their position within and without the union by asserting quintessentially *English* traits. Many publications, prominently featuring 'Englishness' in their titles, bear witness to that.[35] It is an ongoing and heated debate, which tries to steer clear of merely jingoistic celebration of nationhood. Nevertheless, 'Englishness' these days often appears tinged with nostalgia, evoking images of a traditional, tranquil, in some cases even *mythical* England, rather than those of Blair's *Cool Britannia*.

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34 Girouard, *The Return to Camelot*, p. 260.

35 See for example Clive Aslett, *Anyone for England: A Search for British Identity* (London, 1997); Ian Beaucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton, NJ, 1999); Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds), *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880–1920* (London, 1986); Antony Easthope, *Englishness and National Culture* (London, 1999); Judy Giles and Tim Middleton (eds), *Writing Englishness 1900–1950: An Introductory Sourcebook on National Identity* (London, 1995); Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character 1650–1850* (Oxford, 2000); David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London, 1998).

Countless writers have, over the centuries, compiled their personal lists of what, for them, England and Englishness stand for. Orwell in 1941 evoked 'the clatter of clogs in the Lancashire mill towns, the to-and-fro of the lorries on the Great North Road, the queues outside the Labour Exchanges, the rattle of pin-tables in the Soho pubs, the old maids biking to Holy Communion through the mists of the autumn morning – all these are … characteristic fragments, of the English scene'.[36] John Betjeman elaborated in 1943 that 'to me … England stands for the Church of England, eccentric incumbents, oil-lit churches, Women's Institutes, modest village inns, arguments about cow parsley on the altar, the noise of mowing machines on Saturday afternoons … branch-line trains, light railways, leaning on gates and looking across fields …'.[37] A.L. Rowse in 1945 echoed this with his 'deep love for, English things, for our countryside and towns, with their memories of the people who inhabited them and of the things that took place there…; for places associated with names that are the very stuff of our tradition. ... for our tradition itself and the literature in which it is expressed and handed on'.[38]

These statements were all made during the Second World War, which saw a dramatic rise in patriotic writing, especially that praising the beauty of the countryside – as if to remind the soldiers at the front what they were fighting for. However, such writing was and is by no means restricted to times of crisis. In 1926, for example, Stanley Earl Baldwin philosophized that 'to me, England is the country and the country is England', and evoked the century-old 'eternal sight of England' in the shape of a 'plough team coming over the brow of a hill' to the accompaniment of 'the tinkle of the hammer on the anvil in the country smithy'.[39] Similarly, Paul Cohen-Portheim wrote in 1930 that 'English sport, English art, English Society, are all rooted in that peaceful green-turfed countryside with its gently undulating hills and lofty copses …'.[40] In 1935, Arthur Bryant elaborated on the 'beauty of our landscape – almost painful in its intensity sometimes', and H.A.L. Fisher enthused about the 'unique and incommunicable beauty of the English landscape ... that constitutes for most Englishmen the strongest of all the ties which bind them to their country'.[41] As recently as 1998, Jeremy Paxman wrote about 'the extraordinary enchantment of the English countryside', and explained that 'the landscape of England is the landscape of its imaginative inheritance'.[42] Comparing the United States with England, Henry James had earlier famously listed American shortcomings: 'No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy … no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages, nor ivied ruins, no cathedrals, nor

36 George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* (London, 1941), p. 11. John Major famously tried to revive that scene in the 1990s.

37 John Betjeman, 'Oh, to be in England', *The Listener* 29/739 (11 March 1943): 296.

38 A.L. Rowse, *The English Spirit: Essays in History and Literature* (London, 1945), p. v.

39 Stanley, Earl Baldwin, *On England and Other Addresses* (London, 1926), pp. 6–7.

40 Paul Cohen-Portheim, *England, the Unknown Isle* (London, 1934), p. 13.

41 Arthur Bryant, *The National Character* (London, 1935), p. 7; H.A.L. Fisher, 'The Beauty of England', *CPRE, The Penn Country of Buckinghamshire* (1948): 15.

42 Jeremy Paxman, *The English: A Portrait of a People* (London, 1998), pp. 169–70.

abbeys, nor little Norman churches; no great universities, nor public schools. No Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class – no Epsom nor Ascot!'[43] Those 'lists' – Aileen Ribeiro suggests that 'the making of such lists ("listism"?) is a peculiarly English idiosyncrasy' – are by no means a thing of the past.[44] Paxman recently compiled:

> … village cricket and Elgar, Do-It-Yourself, punk, street fashion, irony, vigorous politics, brass bands, Shakespeare, Cumberland sausages, double-decker buses, Vaughan Williams, Donne and Dickens, twitching net curtains, breast-obsession, quizzes and crosswords, country churches, dry-stone walls, gardening, Christopher Wren and Monthy Python, easy-going Church of England vicars, the Beatles, bad hotels and good beer, church bells, Constable and Piper, finding foreigners funny, David Hare and William Cobbett, drinking to excess, Women's Institutes, fish and chips, curry, Christmas Eve at King's College, Cambridge, indifference to food, civility and crude language, fell-running, ugly caravan sites on beautiful cliff-tops, crumpets, Bentleys and Reliant Robins…

while Julian Barnes, (de)constructing national identity in his novel *England, England*, collects the 'Fifty Quintessences of Englishness', which include the class system, the Royal Family, snobbery, phlegm/stiff upper lip and emotional frigidity.[45]

The gentleman in turn has always been considered a stock figure of Englishness. V.S. Naipaul in *The Enigma of Arrival* claims that 'you cannot say you know England until you know the English Gentleman'.[46] Over centuries, this notion of the gentleman as a quintessentially *English* phenomenon has not only persisted, but has been actively furthered by Englishmen and foreigners alike. Wilhelm Dibelius sees the gentleman as typically English: 'Among the things every Englishman is proud of … is the fact that the idea of the gentleman is peculiar to England'.[47] Sir Ernest Barker disagrees: 'What is far more dubious, and indeed untenable, is the assumption of Dibelius that the ideal of the gentleman is peculiar to England. It is a general European ideal'.[48] Sir Ernest's is one of only very few dissenting voices. The term 'gentleman' is traditionally coupled with the adjective English, and *Fowler's Modern English Usage* explains '… an Englishman … aspires to be an *English* gentleman; he knows that *England* expects every man to do his duty. ... Who speaks of a British gentleman… ?'[49] England – who in all matters political always tried to forge national unity among the four countries of the kingdom by putting an emphasis on the term British – nevertheless reserved the adjective English to define some of

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43 Henry James, quoted in Macneile W. Dixon, *The Englishman* (London, 1931), p. 103.

44 Aileen Ribeiro, 'On Englishness in Dress', in Christopher Breward, Becky Conekin and Caroline Cox (eds), *The Englishness of English Dress* (Oxford, 2002), p. 15.

45 Paxman, *The English*, pp. 22–3; Julian Barnes, *England, England* (London, 1998), pp. 83–5.

46 V.S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival* (London, 1987), p. 161.

47 Wilhelm Dibelius, quoted in Sir Ernest Barker, *Traditions of Civility: Eight Essays* (Cambridge, 1948), p. 124.

48 Barker, *Traditions of Civility*, pp. 124–5.

49 *Fowler's Modern English Usage* quoted in Donald Horne, *God is an Englishman* (Sydney, 1970), p. 31.

her prized assets, such as the gentleman, the epitome of manliness. Here, it was clearly England herself who wanted – and got – the credit.

The Englishness of the ideal has been further emphasized by Letwin: 'everyone agrees that the gentleman is a traditional English phenomenon. Dr. Arnold reported "a total absence" in France and though Coleridge taught England to admire Germany, he found that the species was unknown there. Foreigners have endorsed this view by just importing the English word'.[50] A "distinguished German jurist" questioned his English friends in 1883: 'Do you know any good treatise on the duties and characters of a *gentleman*? It is a peculiarly English social type'.[51] McNeile W. Dixon, intrepid American observer of all things English in the 1930s, described the idea of the gentleman as 'characteristically and admittedly English', and elaborated that 'every one in England, if not in wealth or position, at least in his actions, desires to be thought a gentleman'.[52] Ralph Waldo Emerson had already emphasized the gentleman's Englishness by favourably comparing it to potential European counterparts: 'I much prefer the condition of the English gentleman … to that of any potentate in Europe – whether for travel, or for opportunity of society, or for access to means of science or study, or for mere comfort and easy healthy relation to people at home.'[53] Harold Laski stated in 1939 that 'it is the boast of England that the idea of being a gentleman is peculiar to her people, and I think there is solid substance in the boast', and Kazantzakis affirmed this in the 1960s when he wrote that 'after centuries, over the rocks and green hills and harbors of England, three great English monuments were erected: Magna Carta, the Gentleman, and Shakespeare. These are the three great triumphs of man *made in England*'.[54] Ian Buruma similarly remembers the anglophilia in The Hague of the 1950s during his childhood:

> What the Anglophiles admired was not so much aristocracy … but something both more liberal and more bourgeois than that: the gentleman, whom André Malraux once called England's *grande création de l'homme*. A bourgeois man with aristocratic manners, a tolerant elitist, who believes in fair play – the image of the English gentleman, bred rather than born, appeals to snobbery and liberalism in equal measure. North of the Woods bristled with would-be English gentlemen.[55]

As recently as 2000, Roger Scruton emphasized that the ideal of the gentleman was 'so frequently proclaimed and acted upon that … it has attracted both commentary and emulation from foreigners, many of whom have adopted the word "gentleman" into their language as an explicit acknowledgement that it names a peculiarly

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50 Shirley Robin Letwin, 'Tradition II: The Morality of the Gentleman', *The Cambridge Review* (7 May 1976): 142.

51 W.R. Browne, 'The English Gentleman', *The National Review* (April 1886): 261.

52 Macneile W. Dixon, *The Englishman* (London, 1931), pp. 78, 82.

53 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *English Traits and Representative Men* (London, 1888), p. 135.

54 Harold Laski, *The Danger of Being a Gentleman and Other Essays* (London, 1939), p. 13; Nikos Kazantzakis, *England* (Oxford, 1965), p. 14.

55 Ian Buruma, *Voltaire's Coconut, or Anglomania in Europe* (London, 1999), p. 9.

English condition and a peculiarly English virtue'.[56] The German historian V.A. Huber already wrote in 1843 that '[the Germans] have nothing of the kind,' and the Frenchman Hippolyte Taine famously commented that 'in France we have not got the word because we have not got the thing …'.[57] The closest thing to the gentleman the French get is, in his opinion, the gentilhomme, but he admits that it is:

> a very different thing. ... Gentilhomme evokes thoughts of elegance, style, tact, finesse, of exquisite politeness, delicate points of honour, of a chivalrous cast of mind, of prodigal liberality and brilliant valour; these were the salient features of the French upper class. Similarly, "gentleman" expresses all the distinctive features of the English upper class … for example, a large private fortune, a considerable household of servants, a certain outward appearance and bearing, habits of ease and luxury; often enough in the eyes of the common people and especially of the servant class, these outward semblances are all that is necessary. Add to them, for more cultivated minds, a liberal education, travel, information, good manners and ease in society. But for real judges the essential quality is one of heart. … For them a real "gentleman" is a truly noble man, a man worthy to command, a disinterested man of integrity, capable of exposing, even sacrificing himself for those he leads; not only a man of honour, but a conscientious man, in whom generous instincts have been confirmed by right thinking and who, acting rightly by nature, acts even more rightly from good principles.[58]

Old values, traditions and institutions are often evoked when compiling lists of Englishness, or of the prerequisites of the gentleman, and a sense of nostalgia is often inevitable. Nostalgia originally designated 'a familiar, if not especially frequent, condition of extreme homesickness' which has since changed 'because … home … can for so many no longer evoke the "remembrance of things past' it once did".[59] According to Davis, nostalgia now describes 'the sometimes pedestrian, sometimes disjunctive, and sometimes eerie sense we carry of our own past and of its meaning for present and future'.[60] Beryl Bainbridge ponders that 'there are people who live in the present and those who live for the future. There are others who live in the past. … Early on, life dictates our preferences. All my parents' bright days had ended before I was born. They faced backwards. In doing so they created within me so strong a nostalgia for time gone that I have never been able to appreciate the present or look to the future'.[61] Her novels, most of them set in the past, support this statement.

Importantly, longing for the past is always connected to the present and, effectively, the future – or rather, disenchantment with the present and fear of what the future might bring. Human beings, after all, are prone to burying their heads,

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56 Roger Scruton, *England: An Elegy* (London, 2000), p. 64.

57 V.A. Huber, quoted in Shirley Robin Letwin, 'The Idea of a Gentleman: Englishmen in Search of a Character', *Encounter* 57/5 (1981): 18; Hippolyte Taine, *Taine's Notes on England* (London, 1957), p. 144.

58 Taine, *Taine's Notes on England*, p. 145.

59 Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesteryear: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York, 1979), pp. 1, 6.

60 Davis, *Yearning for Yesteryear*, p. 6.

61 Beryl Bainbridge, *English Journey, or The Road to Milton Keynes* (London, 1984), p. 7.

ostrich-like, in the sand, and a dread of the future can easily lead to looking back longingly to times when things appeared better. Susan Bassnett describes Britain's recent predicament:

> This nostalgia hardly accords with the image of a forward looking nation moving into the twenty-first century. … It is a nostalgia that says: sometime in the past there was something known as Englishness and it was good. But now it has changed, it has vanished and we can no longer find it. This view cuts right across political, class and gender divides and unites all kinds of people in England in a sense of loss.[62]

Baudrillard famously wrote that 'when the real thing is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning', and Keith Robbins explains that 'a certain nostalgia for the past makes the present seem more tolerable. ... The solace it provides can give new hope, though it can also make the present seem prosaic and the future even more problematic than it necessarily is'.[63] Nostalgia, consequently, is inevitably linked to memory, and not necessarily *personal* memory. It is possible to experience nostalgic yearning for something not actually experienced personally.[64] Memory, Zygmunt Bauman writes, 'is the after-life of history. It is through memory that history continues to live in the hopes, the ends, and the expectations of men and women as they seek to make sense of the business of life. ... Memory is history-in-action'.[65] In literature, memory often serves as a key plot device: in *Coming up for Air*, Orwell's George Bowling, in dread of a war he is convinced is approaching, takes time off work for a quite literal trip down memory lane to his childhood village. He closes his eyes to the present, reminiscing yearningly about the 1900s when 'Vicky [was] at Windsor'.[66] 'My theme is memory, that winged host that soared about me one grey morning of war-time' (*BR*, 215), explains Waugh's Charles Ryder in *Brideshead Revisited*. In the unpleasant times of war, fond but even sad memories of things past seem indefinitely more pleasant than the dreary facts of the present and the fear of what else the war might bring. The twentieth century was one of drastic social and economic changes, overshadowed by the catastrophe of two world wars and the Holocaust of the European Jews. A nostalgic retreat into a more peaceful past prompted by the 'winged host of memory' consequently features in much writing of the century, but it is always crucial to probe the depicted nostalgia and investigate whether it describes a real or rather an imagined past.

Despite the twentieth-century preoccupation with nostalgia it is not a modern invention but has been apparent throughout history. The chivalric era of knights

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62 Susan Bassnett, 'The Myth of the English Hero', in Marialuisa Bignami and Caroline Patey (eds), *Moving the Borders* (Milan, 1996), p. 342.

63 Jean Baudrillard, *Essays* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 171; Keith Robbins, *Great Britain: Identities, Institutions and the Idea of Britishness* (London, 1998), p. 3.

64 A contemporary example for this is our current fascination with 'returning to the past' in TV-shows – the *1900 House*, for example, the *Edwardian Country House* or even attempts to recreate an Iron Age village.

65 Zygmunt Bauman, *Memories of Class: The Pre-History and After-Life of Class* (London, 1982), p. 1.

66 George Orwell, *Coming Up For Air* (London, 1990), p. 31.

in shining armour had nostalgic revivals not only in Tudor times, but also in the nineteenth century. Even in the orderly Victorian era, men like Carlyle and Ruskin 'look[ed] back to the past to find the ordered, stable society they wanted, which accounted for their "medievalism"'.[67] In painting, the Pre-Raphaelites created evocative images of a chivalric past. In architecture, the nineteenth century saw the emergence of Victorian Gothic; the bold, fearless and gravity-defying constructions of an earlier age considered the most impressive to celebrate and commemorate the glory of Victoria Regina and her people. At the same time, the intellectual élite tried to give shape to the idea of the ideal man – which, according to Harrison, were 'attempts to revive ancient ideas of social hierarchy' – while philosophers and political thinkers always, as ever, returned to the ancient ideals of Athens and Rome.[68]

Nostalgia, however, has its dangers. Davis says that it 'tells us more about present moods than about past realities'.[69] Memories and yearning for the past can turn the real into an idealized past, seen through rose-tinted glasses. 'Remembered history seldom agrees with the history of historians', Bauman points out, and Cannadine stresses, that 'the trouble with too much nostalgia is that it makes you go blind'.[70]

Davis divides nostalgia into three different categories: simple nostalgia (which, simply and plainly, means that 'things were better then'), reflexive nostalgia (a questioning whether the past was really better and, if so, why) and finally interpretative nostalgia (which analyses and problematizes the feeling of nostalgia *per se*).[71] All of the authors discussed in this book deal with nostalgia in *one way or another*: some merely to chronicle it; others to wallow in it; and yet others again to highlight its dangers, and the risks involved in applying and imitating old traditions and ideals unquestioningly.

67 John R. Harrison, *The Reactionaries* (London, 1967), p.24.

68 Harrison, *The Reactionaries*, p. 27.

69 Davis, *Yearning for Yesteryear*, p. 10.

70 Bauman, *Memories of Class*, p. 1; David Cannadine, *The Pleasures of the Past* (London, 1989), p. 109.

71 Davis, *Yearning for Yesteryear*, pp. 17ff.

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Chapter 3

A Popular Literary Trope – A Brief History of the Gentleman in Literature

The Gentleman in Literature

'There is hardly a book in the whole range of English literature or a character in English history who has not something to say somewhere about the idea of the gentleman'.[1] So writes Philip Mason in his *The English Gentleman.* And although this is a sweeping statement, he is correct. The preoccupation in English literature with the ideal of the gentleman is astounding. Even writers whose work is not necessarily associated with the image of the gentleman were and are intrigued by the ideal.[2] Particularly noteworthy is a discussion between Ernest Hemingway and his then boss, Ford Madox Ford:

> "Tell me why one cuts people," I asked. Until then I had thought it was something only done in novels by Ouida … "A gentleman," Ford explained, "will always cut a cad." ... "Would he cut a bounder?" … "It would be impossible for a gentleman to know a bounder." "Then you can only cut someone you have known on terms of equality?" … "Naturally." "How would one ever meet a cad?" "You might not know it, or the fellow could have become a cad." "What is a cad? … Isn't he someone that one has to thrash within an inch of his life?" "Not necessarily." … "Is Ezra a gentleman?" I asked. "Of course not. … He's an American." "Can't an American be a gentleman?" "Perhaps John Quinn," Ford explained. "Certain of your ambassadors." "Myron T. Herrick?" "Possibly." "Was Henry James a gentleman?" "Very nearly." "Are you a gentleman?" "Naturally. I have held His Majesty's commission." "It's very complicated," I said. "Am I a gentleman?" "Absolutely not," Ford said. "Then why are you drinking with me?" "I'm drinking with you as a promising young writer. As a fellow writer in fact." "Good of you," I said. "You might be considered a gentleman in Italy," Ford said magnanimously. "But I'm not a cad?" "Of course not, dear boy. Who ever said such a thing?" "I might become one," I said sadly. "Drinking brandy and all. That was what did for Lord Harry Hotspur in Trollope. Tell me, was Trollope a gentleman?" "Of course not." "You're sure?" "There might be

1 Philip Mason, *The English Gentleman: The Rise and Fall of an Ideal* (London, 1993), p. 14.

2 This includes Joyce: 'Buck Mulligan showed a shaven cheek over his right shoulder. – God, isn't he dreadful? he said frankly. A ponderous Saxon. He thinks you're not a gentleman. God, these bloody English. Bursting with money and indigestion. Because he comes from Oxford. You know, Dedalus, you have the real Oxford manner. He can't make you out.' (James Joyce, *Ulysses* [London, 2000], pp. 2–3).

> two opinions. But not in mine." "Was Fielding? He was a judge." "Technically perhaps." "Marlowe?" "Of course not." "John Donne?" "He was a parson." "It's fascinating," I said. "I'm glad you're interested," Ford said.[3]

This quotation shows that even modern(ist) writers such as Hemingway and Ford were intrigued by the social phenomenon of the gentleman, and struggled to comprehend its implications. In Ford Madox Ford, author of two of the most renowned fictional works on the English gentleman in the twentieth century – *The Good Soldier* and, in particular, *Parade's End* – Hemingway potentially had a good teacher, although Ford used the opportunity to tease.[4] The question is *why* Ford teased him so. Did he enjoy the younger man's ignorance? Or did he need to cover up his own helplessness at defining so elusive a term? Ford's elaborations on the ideal are noteworthy for their irony, which lies mainly in his *subjectivity* of outlook, and his refusal even to attempt a definition. If one were to give credence to his highly ironic account, no other than Ford himself was a gentleman.

The gentleman in literature can be traced throughout the ages, Chaucer's 'verray, parfit, gentil knight' being possibly the first literary manifestation.[5] According to Mason, 'the beginnings of the Gentleman's pedigree are displayed with astonishing clarity [in it]'.[6] In the *Canterbury Tales*, we see for the first time the distinction between the gentleman of birth and the gentleman of merit:

> But for ye speken of swich gentillesse
> As is descended out of old richesse
> That therefore sholden ye be gentil men –
> Swich errogance is nat worth an hen.
> Looke who that is moost virtuous always,
> Pryvee and apert, and moost entendeth af
> To do the gentil dedes that he kan,
> Taak hym fur the gentileste man.[7]

Since the time of Chaucer, the gentleman has been a staple ingredient in both fictional and critical writing. At the end of the sixteenth century, Spenser's introductory letter to his patron Sir Walter Raleigh, prefacing *The Faerie Queene*, explains that the 'general intention & meaning' of his work was 'to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline'.[8] In another courtier at the court of Elizabeth, Sir Philip Sidney, poet, scholar and warrior, Renaissance England had already found the paragon of gentlemanly virtues. When he died in 1586, the country mourned. His

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3 Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (London, 1996), pp. 73–4.

4 For a discussion on Ford's depiction of the gentleman, see my 'A Modernist Elegy to the Gentleman? Englishness and the Idea of the Gentleman in Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*,' in Dennis Brown and Jennifer Plastow (eds), *Ford and Englishness* (Amsterdam, 2006), pp. 195–209.

5 Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. N.F. Blake (London, 1980), p. 33.

6 Mason, *The English Gentleman*, p. 34.

7 Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, pp. 210–1.

8 Edmund Spenser, 'Letter to Sir Walter Raleigh', in *The Faerie Queene* (London, 1978), p. 15.

heroic – albeit unnecessary – death in battle epitomized the idea of chivalry, and was turned into an instant legend: injured after giving away parts of his armour, the dying Sidney gallantly offered his drinking water to another injured soldier. Mason states that 'everyone remembers it because it was the last touch that was needed to turn the perfect courtier into a perfect gentleman'.[9] Interestingly enough, there is some speculation among contemporary scholars that the story of Sidney's heroic death was possibly invented – or at least elaborated on – by his biographer Fulke Greville. But even if this is true, it still accords with the notion that the ideal of the gentleman is 'constructed': gentlemen would have been *expected* to act like that. Inventing such a story about a celebrated Renaissance courtier would only add weight to the *myth* of the gentleman, much in the same vein as the allegedly selfless men aboard the Titanic, who gave up their seats in the lifeboats, or Scott and Oats dying their heroic deaths at the Pole.

It is not only drama or poetry that featured the gentleman. Over the centuries, much critical and advisory writing on what it takes to be a gentleman has been published. These articles represent the moods and discussions of their time. An admirable example of this is Richard Steele's article of 2 March 1711, in which he describes an imaginary gentleman's club, whose members come from different ranks of society. Steele assembles not only conventional representatives of the gentleman – the country squire, the captain in the army, and the cleric – but also the student of law, the dandy, and, most importantly, the merchant.[10] This reflected the animated contemporary debate about who had the right to call himself, and even more crucially, to *be called* a gentleman. Steele and his colleague Addison both believed that it was *merit* rather than *birth* that mattered. Debates such as these eased the way up the social ladder for businessmen and merchants. In 1886, W.R. Browne of *The National Review* echoed Steele's gentleman's club by dividing gentlemen into 'four main sub-divisions, as follows: (1) the Squire, (2) the Parson, (3) the professional man, (4) the man of business'.[11] But with his six different types of gentlemen – or rather seven, since the author included himself – Steele showed already in 1711 that the social sphere of his contemporary world had widened and was widening further; that men previously considered to be of lower rank could now be admitted into the higher strata of gentlemanliness, and make vital contributions towards the good of mankind.

The eighteenth century saw not only the rise of the bourgeois middle classes and their slow but steady appropriation of the term 'gentleman', but also, and closely connected, the rise of the novel. Arlene Young writes about 'the vital role played by the novel … in the evolution of class relations in nineteenth-century England', a statement which can be extended to include the eighteenth century.[12] Three names come to mind immediately: Fielding, Richardson and Austen. While Fielding dealt

9 Mason, *The English Gentleman*, p. 59.

10 Richard Steele, '2 March 1711', in *The Spectator, 5 Vols*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford, 1965), Vol. 1, pp. 7–13.

11 W.R. Browne, 'The English Gentleman', *The National Review* (April 1886): 267.

12 Arlene Young, *Culture, Class and Gender in the Victorian Novel* (London, 1999), p. 2.

ironically with themes of gentlemanliness in *Tom Jones*, Richardson, in contrast, used his moralizing tales to target aristocratic rakes who believed that their names and title gave them licence to do whatever they pleased. Richardson's Mr. B., and especially his Lovelace, are dashing rogues who live for immediate gratification of their every whim, even if that means compromising innocent girls. Lovelace not only captures and imprisons, but also rapes the object of his desire, Clarissa. When she dies of sorrow at her fate, he repents, but is killed soon after, appropriately in a duel, a gentleman's acknowledged way of defending or re-establishing his honour. Lovelace's death in such a fight aptly illustrates that he has lost the right to assert his honour, and with it the right to call himself a gentleman. By means of his upper-class rakes, Richardson demonstrates two different things: he criticizes ruthless behaviour in an upper class that *should* set a good example. But, more importantly, he shows that society – although possibly not condoning it – accepts wayward behaviour from upper-class men, for which many a lesser man would swing from the gallows. Richardson's rakes echo attitudes of the seventeenth-century Cavalier poets, stout Royalists and courtiers, dashing off their poems with *sprezzatura* for the entertainment of their audience. They enjoyed the good life regardless of reputation, and it is precisely this exuberance they wanted to show in their poetry. Richardson's anti-hero Lovelace aptly bears the name of the Cavalier Poet Richard Lovelace. Nevertheless, Richardson soon left the negative example of the Cavalier poets behind in favour of a new epitome of Christian, charitable gentlemanly values in *Sir Charles Grandison*.

Jane Austen, by comparison, was considerably more subtle in her work. Mason writes that she 'was aware of every element of ambiguity in the word "gentleman", whether used as a marker of social position or implying a standard of conduct'.[13] Her men span the entire social scale, from the rake (although Wickham or Willoughby are a far cry from the ruthless Lovelace) via the upper-class snobbishness (though essentially good-heartedness) of Mr. Darcy, to the perfect gentleman Mr. Knightley. Austen astutely highlights the changes in society, here in particular with the union of Darcy and his social inferior Elizabeth Bennett. Most telling for the social changes in Austen's time is the exchange between Elizabeth and Darcy's aunt Lady Catherine de Bourgh: '"If you were sensible of your own good"', Lady Catherine expostulates with Elizabeth, '"you would not wish to quit the sphere in which you have been brought up". "In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal"'.[14] Elizabeth's attitude shows a raised awareness of true gentlemanliness – as that embodied by her father – versus the old, often abused privileges of the upper classes. Austen's is a distinctive voice still reaching out to us from the early nineteenth century, and conveying social differences by subtle means: a dress too fashionable, a coat too red, a *tone* not *quite* in keeping with what is expected.

The nineteenth century saw the heyday of the gentlemanly ideal, both in real life and in literature: Thackeray, Dickens and Trollope among countless other authors used their novels to impress upon society their notions of gentlemanliness. Thackeray

13 Mason, *The English Gentleman*, p. 79.

14 Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (Oxford, 1991), p. 316.

was the one writer still most deeply steeped in eighteenth-century literary traditions: his *Vanity Fair* abounds with true Restoration rakes in both George Osborne and Rawdon Crawley, whereas his William Dobbin is the perfect, patient, long-suffering gentleman in the tradition of Richardson's *Grandison*. Dickens's main contribution to the theme of the gentleman comes in the form of *Great Expectations*. Pip's yearning 'I want to be a gentleman' is symptomatic of a time when society more than ever believed in nature's gentleman, and in the possibility of social advancement through constant striving and impeccable morals.[15] Although starting off with wrong conceptions – equating gentlemanly status with financial wealth, fine clothes and pompous behaviour rather than virtue and irreproachable manners – Pip eventually learns that it is the inner values rather than the outer manifestation of fortune which make a man a gentleman. Dinah Maria Mullock's novel *John Halifax, Gentleman* picked up a similar kind of narrative: the orphaned John Halifax, through hard work and reliability, builds up his own industrial empire. When his son reacts with embarrassment to his family's humble beginnings in life – '"Father … we may as well pass over that fact. We are gentlefolks now"' – John reprimands him gently: '"We always were, my son."'[16] Dickens's and Mulock's self-made men, constantly striving for both moral and material self-improvement, and thus vastly popular with the Victorian reading public, stand in opposition to Trollope's traditional squires – for instance Sir Roger Carbury in *The Way We Live Now*, closely modelled on Steele and Addison's ideal squire Sir Roger de Coverley. All three authors agreed that only inner values could make a man a gentleman. Trollope's Sir Roger tellingly ponders that 'a title … could make no man a gentleman, but, if improperly worn, might degrade a man who would otherwise be a gentleman. He thought that a gentleman, born and bred, acknowledged as such without doubt, could not be made more than a gentleman by all the titles which the Queen could give'.[17]

Nineteenth-century authors were conscious of what the gentleman meant for them and for their readership. The two versions of the ideal, the self-made man and the perfect squire, were its most prominent literary depictions. As the century progressed, other representations gained popularity: the public-school man, as immortalized in Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays*; the adventurer and Empire man, epitomized in the novels by Kipling and Haggard.[18] The nineteenth century hardly saw the publication of any novel which did not feature some kind of gentlemanly discourse, intended to sustain, improve and morally edify its readers.

In contemporary writing, both in primary and in related critical works, the gentleman still features prominently. If the eighteenth and nineteenth century abounded with publications on the gentleman – mainly manuals for social

15 Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (London, 1985), p. 155.

16 Dinah Maria Mulock (Mrs. Craik), *John Halifax, Gentleman* (London, 1961), p. 301.

17 Anthony Trollope, *The Way We Live Now* (Ware, 1995), p. 107.

18 Tom's father, Squire Brown, on sending the boy off to school, thinks that 'I don't care a straw for Greek particles or the digamma. … If he'll only turn out a brave, helpful, truth-telling Englishman and a gentleman and a Christian, that's all I want' (Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* [London, 1900], pp. 60–1).

improvement – the latter part of the twentieth century has seen a surge of critical publications, not only on the gentleman directly, but on related topics, such as aristocracy, class, manners, courtesy and education.[19] These books are vital for a closer study of the English gentleman. However, there is also a considerable number of publications dedicated solely to the ideal, and to its (re)presentation in culture and society.[20] This (renewed) critical interest in the gentleman could be seen as an attempt to immortalize a dying or dead ideal. But it could also be an indicator of the fact that neither the gentleman nor his presentation in literature, history and society are passé topics; that they are, in fact, still of critical interest. This is supported by the long and varied list of twentieth-century novelists dealing, *in one form or another*, with the English gentleman, ranging from P.G. Wodehouse, E.M. Forster, John Galsworthy and Ford Madox Ford to George Orwell and L.P. Hartley. More contemporary authors include Beryl Bainbridge, Pat Barker and Rose Tremain.[21]

One strand of literature which ought to be mentioned briefly is homoerotic writing. Its development is parallel to that about the gentleman, and it shares many of the same traits. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, authors such as Oscar Wilde, Ronald Firbank or E.M. Forster set the tone for writing on men loving men which has since found many imitators, and much stronger expression, most recently in the work of Alan Hollinghurst.[22] Homoerotic writing grew out of a different conception of manliness which had developed parallel to the notion of the hearty, athletic gentleman: the bookish, artistic aesthete, best exemplified by Oscar Wilde. Much homoerotic writing is set in a gentlemanly environment: upper-class houses, with matching heroes, who do not have to work for a living, but who dedicate themselves to life and *les belles artes*. Bristow writes that Wilde, for

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19 See, for example, Marjorie Morgan, *Manners, Morals and Class in England 1774–1858* (London, 1994); Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1998); David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London, 1996), *Class in Britain* (New Haven, CT, 1998); Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1996); Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge, 1985).

20 See, for example, Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven, CT, 1981); Robin Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (London, 1981); David Castronovo, *The English Gentleman: Images and Ideals in Literature and Society* (New York, 1987); Hugh David, *Heroes, Mavericks and Bounders: The English Gentleman from Lord Curzon to James Bond* (London, 1991); Catherine Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (Princeton, NJ, 2001); or Philip Mason's previously cited *The English Gentleman: The Rise and Fall of an Ideal*.

21 There are too many authors dealing with the gentleman in the twentieth century to list here, but they include such diverse names as Ivy Compton-Burnett, Elizabeth Bowen, Nancy Mitford, Molly Keane, Angus Wilson, Peter Ackroyd, Peter Carey, Mick Jackson, V.S. Naipaul, John Fowles and Alan Hollinghurst. Some authors even feature 'gentleman' in the titles of their novels, for example P.G. Wodehouse, Christopher Hollis, Evelyn Waugh, Julian Farne and A.N. Wilson.

22 For a closer study of the history of homoerotic writing see Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885* (Buckingham, 1995), or Michael Kane's *Modern Men: Mapping Masculinity in English and German Literature, 1880–1930* (London, 1999).

example, 'was … trying to fashion homosexual desire in a guise which could be passed off as something else – the bachelor, the artist, the poser, the forger'.[23] In doing so he presented his heroes as the most acceptable members of their society: perfect gentlemen. Wilde's characters are thus in a unique and privileged position: they can deconstruct society from within. Other authors have used similar literary tools. We have only to think of Hornung's Raffles: perfect gentleman and popular house guest of affluent families during the day, he robs their houses during the night. In more contemporary literature and popular culture we have the figure of James Bond, the perfect, Savile Row-clad gentleman with impeccable taste – who easily assumes his second persona of agent in Her Majesty's secret service. E.M. Forster, on the other hand, often juxtaposed his effeminate artists with bullying athletes: Leonard Bast is killed by the bullish Charles Wilcox in *Howards End*; weak Ricky Eliott opposed by his brutish half-brother Stephen Wonham in *The Longest Journey*. Forster consciously presented his readers with two different types of masculinity, and his own sympathies seem divided, an attitude which will be shown in Chapter 6 to exist in Evelyn Waugh's work.

The fact that so many twentieth-century authors still write about the gentleman can in itself be taken as proof that the ideal still continues to fascinate not only the writers but also, and in the long run more importantly, the reading public. In 1951, Elizabeth Bowen remarked: 'Would such writing succeed – which is to say, be acceptable – if there were not a call for it? I suppose, no. One of the dangerous powers of the writer is that he feeds, or plays up to, fantasies he knows to exist'.[24] Bowen had then been writing about nostalgia. But the statement can easily be applied to writing on the gentleman. For once the economics of the publishing world come in useful: if there were no market for books on the gentleman, there would be no such books. The fact that the twentieth century has seen such a vast number of publications on an allegedly passé topic shows that the figure of the gentleman – albeit in different guises and with changing functions – still haunts the collective consciousness of the British reading public.

The Gentleman in Literature: Sociological, Cultural and Gender-Related Approaches

Diana Laurenson explains the Sociology of Literature as 'the study of literature *in* society (or of society *in* literature)'.[25] Stuart Hall argues that it was F.R. Leavis who first 'understood that there was something important about the connections between the internal constitution of the text and the social context in which it was produced', although he still believed in the autonomy of the text.[26] Robert Escarpit, by contrast,

23 Bristow, *Effeminate England*, p. 36.

24 Elizabeth Bowen, 'The Cult of Nostalgia', *The Listener* (9 August 1951): 225.

25 Diana Laurenson, *The Sociology of Literature: Applied Studies* (Keele, 1978), p. 6.

26 Stuart Hall, 'A Critical Survey of the Theoretical and Practical Achievements of the Last Ten Years', in Francis Barker, John Coombes, Peter Hulme, David Musselwhite and Richard Osborne (eds), *Literature, Society and the Sociology of Literature: Proceedings of the Conference held at the University of Essex, July 1976* (Colchester, 1977), p. 1.

sees the beginning of a Sociology of Literature in the work of Mme de Staël whose *De la littérature considerée dans ses rapports avec les institutions socials* of 1800 tried to join literature and society by searching for influences of religion, morals and law on literature and vice versa.[27]

As a sociological phenomenon, the gentleman can be seen as having been at first a representative of the upper classes, and later an ideal to be emulated and copied by all classes, worldwide. As a cultural and historical phenomenon, he made his mark as an educational ideal, and as a figure in many guises. The influence of society on literature – and, similarly, of literature on society – is consequently of primary importance.

From sociological readings of literature, it is only a small step to Cultural Studies. Raymond Williams argues that 'what is now often called "cultural studies" is already a branch of general sociology'.[28] 'Culture' itself, judging by the number of attempted definitions, is a murky term, elusive of definite pin-pointing. Williams explains it as 'a noun of *confirmation* or *generalisation* of the "spirit" which informed the "whole way of life" of a distinct people'; Eagleton points out that it is a word used in various contexts: 'culture (in the sense of the arts) defines a quality of the living (culture as civility) which it is the task of political change to realize in culture (in the sense of social life) as a whole.'[29] T.S. Eliot argued that '[t]he term *culture* has different associations according to whether we have in mind the development of an *individual*, of a *group* or *class*, or of a *whole society*. … the culture of the individual is dependent upon the culture of a group or class, and … the culture of the group or class is dependent upon the culture of the whole society to which that group or class belongs. Therefore it is the culture of the society that is fundamental'.[30] He ponders 'how much is here embraced by the term *culture*', and his highly idiosyncratic list of English culture includes 'Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the Twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pintable, the dart board, Wensleydale Cheese, boiled cabbage … beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar' to which he adds that 'the reader can make his own list'.[31] Culture – just like gentleman – thus means something different to each individual, and it is possible to draw up a similarly subjective inventory for the gentleman, which might include top hat, stiff upper lip, public school, emotional frigidity, clubs, evening clothes, arrogance, fox hunting, courteous behaviour, cricket, aristocracy, good manners, fair play, homoeroticism, country houses, period films, Englishness, moustaches, cigars, Pall Mall, dandyism, menservants, class ... and so on.[32]

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27 Robert Escarpit, *Sociology of Literature* (London, 1971), p. 3.

28 Raymond Williams, *Culture* (London, 1981), p. 14.

29 Williams, *Culture*, p. 10; Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford, 2000), p. 20.

30 T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London, 1948), p. 21.

31 Eliot, *Notes*, 31. This list is evocative of other authors' descriptions of England and Englishness, such as, for example, George Orwell's 'As I Please', which also, incidentally, includes Wensleydale Cheese. (See George Orwell, 'As I Please', in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, Vol. III, As I Please, 1943–1945*, eds Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus [London, 1968], pp. 207–10).

32 In this context it is interesting to mention an exercise I conducted in February 2003: 35 second-year and 30 third-year students at the University of Derby were asked to jot down

This leads to the question of class, and of the extent to which the gentleman must be considered the result of a class-conscious or, rather more pointedly, a class-obsessed society. John Betjeman referred to class as 'that topic all-absorbing, as it was, is now and ever shall be, to us …'.[33] Although the term 'gentleman' is a statement of moral value, which can be used across class-boundaries – nineteenth-century notions of 'nature's gentleman' made sure of that – the upper-class connection is still in evidence, if only in people's class-conscious minds.

When it comes to the fashioning of the gentleman, Foucault's ideas of power discourses cannot be left out of consideration. Foucault believed that a person, from infancy onwards, is surrounded by discourses of power (read here, oversimplified, rules) which determine his or her life. Codes of behaviour and society's expectations are imbibed in childhood, and rigorously, though often unconsciously, adhered to throughout life. Foucault's notion that power discourses permeate society can easily be applied to the ideal of the English gentleman, and here in particular to the importance of behaviour. Bryson writes that 'manners ... might be defined not just as a set of social rules, but as the rules which define the end-product of socialisation. … the child "internalises" rules of decency and good behaviour as the very basis of participation in the social world …'.[34] This definition recalls Foucault's idea of discourse and discursive practices, which he called 'tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations'.[35] Weeks explains that 'Foucault's … [d]iscursive practices … are embodied in technical processes, in institutions, and in patterns of general behaviour. The unity of a discourse, therefore, does not derive from the fact that it describes a "real object," but from the social practices which actually form the object about which discourses speak. The "social" is constituted through these practices'.[36] On the subject of manners, and here especially gentlemanly manners, the French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu explains that 'a code of "gentlemanly" behaviour would be less an assemblage of meanings and forms of conduct exhibited by gentlemen than a set of ideological strategies for being a gentleman'.[37] Bryson writes that 'by speaking of social "strategies" Bourdieu does not mean that the individual is always freely choosing between rules and standards. ... [He] studies symbolic systems and what he calls the "habitus" – the basic habits, mental orientations, and tastes which are "second nature" to their possessors – as structures which determine the range of individual choice'.[38] By combining Foucault's and Bourdieu's theories, one can therefore conclude that human beings are surrounded by discursive

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their reactions to the word 'gentleman': out of 65 responses, about two thirds started by listing polite or good manners. Many commented on the necessity of a good and 'looked-after' appearance for a gentleman. On the class issue, the students were divided: slightly more than half still considered the 'gentleman' to be bound up with class, whereas the rest considered it a classless phenomenon, a state of being achievable by anybody.

33 John Betjeman, 'Beside the Seaside', in *Collected Poems* (London, 1979), p. 163.

34 Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, p. 9.

35 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (London, 1984), pp. 101–2.

36 Jeffrey Weeks, 'Foucault for Historians', *History Workshop Journal* 14 (1982): 111.

37 Pierre Bourdieu, quoted in Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, p. 17.

38 Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, p. 17.

practices determined by class, education and environment. If one considers this theory in relation to social practices throughout the centuries, it is obvious to see that a child born into an upper-class family was surrounded by discursive practices different from those encompassing a working-class child: different discourses which consequently determined a different future. Nowadays, the class demarcation lines are considerably more fluid. Following Foucault, one might say that social pressures on a boy started fully once he entered public school. The public school might consequently be interpreted as an institutionalized implementation of Foucaultian repression, where a boy learnt to use his elbows to advance in life and, crucially, to suppress all emotions. A Foucaultian might argue that a typical English gentleman had imbibed notions of power and repression in his adolescence, lessons which he would and could not forget in adult life, and which made his life a misery, ruled as it was by society's dictates and not personal inclination. This is an attitude we can often find in literature: in Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, for example, Sebastian Flyte is broken by society's expectations. Returning to Foucault, the famous English stiff upper lip could consequently be described as a prominent example of repression discourses: men being educated to keep their emotions at all times firmly under control.

One final approach, which cannot be left out when looking at the representation of the gentleman in literature, is gender studies, and here in particular the study of masculinities. In the late nineteenth century, the official version of British masculinity, ceaselessly promoted in paint, print and photographs in order to indoctrinate Britain's men, was the image of the Christian Empire builder. Critics now voice their conviction that this very trend of advocating adventurous manhood could have led to the unanticipated increase of homoerotic desire. In the literature on the historical development of the gentleman, this trend has so far received little discussion, but is of the utmost importance for literary presentations of the ideal in the twentieth century. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes that 'in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power: a relationship founded on an inherent and potentially active structural congruence'.[39] In the masculine environments of the public school, the university, the army or the gentleman's club, men felt at ease and at home with each other. Emily Eells has coined an important term for this close male-male relationship, not necessarily homosexual but still more than a mere friendship. She calls it *Anglosexuality*, and describes it as 'fus[ing] and confus[ing] the eroticism and aestheticization of same-sex desire. It is a form of sex and sensitivity which is closer to psychological androgyny than biological hermaphroditism. It is more of an aesthetic stance than a physical sexuality …'.[40] In many cases, *Anglosexuality* finds expression in close male friendships or working partnerships. In literature, we have only to think of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson, or Raffles and his admiring

39 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, 1985), p. 25.

40 Emily Eells, *Proust's Cup of Tea: Homoeroticism and Victorian Culture* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 7.

sidekick Bunny. In twentieth-century literature, this trend continues. Relevant for this book, we have Siegfried Sassoon's protagonist's hero worship of not one, but several males; Anthony Powell's narrator Nicholas Jenkins's admiration for his schoolfriend Charles Stringham; Kazuo Ishiguro's butler Stevens's adulation of his master, Lord Darlington; and, most intensively, Charles Ryder's infatuation with Sebastian Flyte in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*.

Where gender-roles are concerned, other trends and fashions – often in the literal sense of clothes – have to be considered as well, for example effeminacy and the late nineteenth-century re-emergence of dandyism.[41] The latter plays an important role in literature, and here often in the depiction of the gentleman. Eells writes that late nineteenth-century London was 'the haunt of the dandy, whose predilection for decadent clothes masked effeminate sexuality'.[42] This renewed cult of the dandy was dominated by the figure of Oscar Wilde – which brings us back full circle to the topic of homoeroticism. Wilde initiated new perceptions of manliness: the effeminate aesthete rather than the athletic adventurer. Until he was openly accused of sodomy, this was an accepted – albeit slightly belittled – alternative masculinity. Kane writes that 'Dorian Gray, the cult of the dandy and aesthete and the very name of Oscar Wilde are associated with open male narcissism, equated at the time and since with male "effeminacy"'.[43] Crucially, he explains that 'this "open narcissism" was perhaps infinitely preferable to the "closeted narcissism" of patriarchal authority, which of course felt threatened by Wilde's display of anarchic, self-affirming narcissism'.[44] Kane thus points out that even the cult of traditional, powerful British masculinity was ultimately based on narcissism, and that Wilde hit a sensitive nerve by affirming his self-admiration as he did. Bristow writes that

> these obviously theatricalizing aspects of Wilde's life and *oeuvre* served to question the founding categories in which the late bourgeois sphere understood the organization of gender. Appearing before his public, with all the appurtenances of the modern dandy, Wilde drove at the heart of the multiple denials and disavowals upon which respectable society was built. If too excessively dressed to be a gentleman, he none the less had the ingenuity to look like the only one in the house, reminding everybody else of their ordinariness.[45]

In its attempt to cleanse the establishment of flamboyant men such as Wilde, society accepted a move away from the aestheticism and beauty that Wilde had tried to capture in his work, to the mere affirmation of accepted values. Foucault confirms this in *The History of Sexuality*: 'the image of the imperial prude is emblazoned on our restrained, mute and hypocritical sexuality'.[46] The figure of the English gentleman, as we know and recognize it today, is derived from this strand of masculinity. However,

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41 For the historical development of the dandy, see Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (Lincoln, NE, 1978).

42 Eells, *Proust's Cup of Tea*, p. 12.

43 Kane, *Modern Men*, p. 50.

44 Kane, *Modern Men*, p. 50.

45 Bristow, *Effeminate England*, p. 34.

46 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 3.

in order to be able to understand literary representations of the gentleman, we have to be aware that there was another parallel, more extravagant version of manliness, hand in hand with a secret flourishing of homoerotic friendships. And in many cases it is this version of masculinity which spilled over into twentieth-century writing. It is in this that the main difference between nineteenth- and twentieth-century depictions of the gentleman can be found. While nineteenth-century writing used the trope of the gentleman mainly as a tool for the moral edification of its readers, twentieth-century writing is much more likely to contrast the ideal to other notions of masculinity, or to problematize its values. Crucially, it also depicts the literary gentleman as a much more subjectivized tool, in order to portray the personal beliefs of the author.

The figure of the dandy is a link to the world of fashion and its importance for the gentleman – whether in a flamboyant or in a traditional manner.[47] In 1946, Evelyn Waugh wrote that:

> the English Gentleman was once one of our most valuable invisible exports. … Men's clothes are an example. London is the centre of the tailoring trade … quite simply because large numbers of foreigners wish to look like English gentlemen. The Pasha …, the jewelled Argentine …, the patient Armenian …, each cherishes the innocent belief that the Savile Row label in his breast pocket makes him indistinguishable from a member of the Turf Club.[48]

In the past – more so than today – fashion could be used as an observable marker of social class. A man needed a certain affluence to *look* like a gentleman. The dandy, for example, is historically always found in the higher strata of society. In the depiction of gentlemen, clothes play an important role; Harvey points out that '[t]he "meanings" of clothes are "constructions" placed on them, and are not readable in a dictionary sense. … These meanings are based on the perceptions of specific choices … as to material, colour, cut, newness, but there is a high degree of ambiguity ...'.[49] Thus hunting pinks may give a sense of belonging, while the wrong kind of overcoat may immediately label a man as being not *quite* the real thing. Again, they may also function to highlight the homoerotic side of a man. And they may show up the superficiality of people in general who immediately equate a well-cut suit with a gentleman.

Much twentieth-century writing picks up what was interrupted by the infamous Wilde vs. Queensberry trial of 1895. Sassoon's novel, for example, celebrates male

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47 The last few years have seen the publication of a host of books linking fashion with the making of gentlemen. See for example Christopher Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life 1860–1914* (Manchester, 1999); Christopher Breward, Becky Conekin and Caroline Cox (eds), *The Englishness of English Dress* (Oxford, 2002); John Harvey, *Men in Black* (London, 1997); and David Kuchta, *The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity: England, 1550–1850* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 2002).

48 Evelyn Waugh, 'What to do with the Upper Classes: A Modest Proposal (1946)', in *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Donat Gallagher (London, 1983), pp. 313–4.

49 Harvey, *Men in Black*, p. 12.

physical beauty. Powell's *Dance* juxtaposes aestheticism and power, represented respectively by the characters Nicholas Jenkins and Kenneth Widmerpool. Waugh, on the other hand, presents us with a host of characters cast in the Wildean mould: Sebastian Flyte with his teddy bear; the openly camp Anthony Blanche and Ambrose Silk; Ivor Claire, who cannot cope with the ugliness of war and deserts. These writers actively engage with themes and ideas which had been of importance a generation before, but had since been discarded by society in a desire to streamline taste and demarcate clearly the boundaries of gender.

The gentleman was, and is, a representative figure of society. His presentation in literature explains much about the very society in which a particular piece of writing was conceived. What kind of gentleman is portrayed? What do these different presentations tell the reader about the particular standing of the gentleman in society? Literary self-made (gentle)men like Pip or John Halifax have a message for the reader, different from that of perfect Mr. Knightleys, boorish Mr. Eliots or roguish Lovelaces. Young not only labels the gentleman a 'cultural symbol', but also hails him 'the most significant of such symbols ...'.[50] Daniel Defoe had already recognized that the gentleman is a cultural construct, the 'exalted figure of our own forming'.[51] This colludes with the idea of the gentleman as a social construct. Young concludes that 'fictional characters are no less cultural constructions, shaped as much by the values and assumptions of the society for which they are created as by the author who creates them'.[52] The gentleman is a social phenomenon, and the use made of him in literature can reveal much. The way an author presents a gentleman reveals much about that very author's social and political background. What do authors want to express when they present their readers with the figure of a gentleman? Their own social belonging? Class criticism? Social envy? Nostalgia? At a time when the ideal of the gentleman was said to be in drastic decline, if not dead already, authors such as Sassoon, Powell, Waugh and Ishiguro use(d) the figure of the gentleman to voice their social concerns, and to come to terms with the fact that their personal conceptions of the ideal could prove contradictory to their own ideologies or lifestyles.

50 Young, *Culture, Class and Gender*, p. 4.

51 Daniel Defoe, *The Compleat Gentleman* (London, 1890), p. 16.

52 Young, *Culture, Class and Gender*, p. 45.

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PART II
Of Heroes, Survivors and Dinosaurs: The Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature

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Chapter 4

The Survival of the Gentleman – Siegfried Sassoon, England and the Sporting Gentleman

Writing in Modern Times

Siegfried Sassoon began writing *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man*, the first instalment of his First World War trilogy *Memoirs of George Sherston*, in September 1926. John Stuart Roberts explains his motivation:

> … he was clear as to its theme and style; the story of a boy growing up, pre-1914, in an upper-class home in Kent. … Surrounded by servants, as Sassoon's circle was in those days, and placed in an idyllic rural setting, the tale would be a chronicle of England at that time … and how that world impinged upon him. It would be a personal view and by intention a local and limited one. … There would be no regard paid to the social, political and industrial upheavals of the 1890s nor to those of the opening decade of the new century. … It was about "remembering and being glad."[1]

'Remembering and being glad' stands in stark contrast to remembering the war, which would, inevitably, lead to feeling anything but glad. Sassoon thus seems to have made a conscious decision to work up towards the war in his own way, to ignore the events leading up to it, to ignore new trends in the arts, and simply to remember a time when he himself was carefree and happy.

As readers, however, we ought to know about the very facts and events omitted by Sassoon in his work. We also have to consider the new trend in literature – modernism – of which Sassoon would have been aware. Virginia Woolf famously wrote that 'on or about December 1910, human character changed'.[2] The reason for this change in human character was the intrusion of modernity into everyday life: changes in transport, for instance – faster trains, new automobiles, the first aeroplanes – sped up everybody's life. These inventions also ensured a change of perspective. In literature, this is obvious in the often fragmentary style of modernist writers, by which authors try to incorporate cubist and Vorticist ideas of fragmentation, of seeing things simultaneously from various perspectives. There were social and political changes as well: the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 marked the end of an era; society was eager to move on and to demand more freedom. In the arts,

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1 John Stuart Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon* (London, 1999), p. 206.

2 Virginia Woolf, 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown' (1924) in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Leonard Woolf (New York, 1967), Vol. I, p. 320.

be it painting, sculpture or literature, artists were eager to experiment, to shed the traditions and inhibitions of the Victorian era and to find their own way to express their understanding – or fear – of their time.

Sassoon's *Memoirs of George Sherston* at first glance do not seem to display many modernist traits, despite the fact that he had several links to modernist art of the time. Many of his friends, among them the Sitwells and Lady Ottoline Morrell, were closely involved in the modernist movement. Sassoon, alongside Osbert Sitwell and W.J. Turner, wrote for the new *Daily Herald*, which helped break 'traditional and rigidly hierarchical codes of class and national identity, social distinction, and cultural value'.[3] His war poetry, on account of his powerful use of irony, and what Jean Moorcroft Wilson refers to as 'direct colloquial anger', is distinctly modernist.[4] Bernard Bergonzi explains that 'throughout the 'twenties … Sassoon wrote sharp, epigrammatic verses that sniped at authority and conventional attitudes. In this respect he was at one with his age'.[5] But Sasson's intentions in writing *Memoirs* show that he wanted to recreate a peaceful world, as yet untouched by the upheavals of modernity – albeit one which disintegrates with the onset of the most evil manifestation of the modern world up to that date: the First World War.

The title of the first volume of the trilogy, *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man*, suggests, rightly or wrongly, that it deals with a traditional subject matter: the first word, 'memoirs', promises the reader a perforce linear narrative, which follows the narrator's life chronologically. The word 'foxhunting' *seems* to situate the narrative in a certain class context. Sassoon's preoccupation with the figure of the gentleman in *Memoirs* is of particular importance, considering the time the novel was written: the late 1920s, when the gentlemanly ideal was allegedly dead and buried.

Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man is deeply steeped in notions of pastoralism. In this, it follows a proud tradition in English writing. Sassoon's love for the English countryside coloured his perception of the gentleman, in that he presents us with a traditional country gentleman. His conception of ideal manhood was also influenced by his own homosexuality, which explains not only the very close male-male friendships at the core of the novel but also the positive hero worship of other men. This combination of pastoralism and homoeroticism leads to an intriguing and very personal version of the gentleman, which makes *Memoirs* an important literary memorial of gentlemanliness.

The Survival of the Gentleman: Sassoon, England and the Sporting Gentleman

Men and women in hunting pink, riding across the green and pleasant land of England – that is the impression the reader has after a first superficial reading of *Memoirs of*

3 Sara Blair, 'Modernism and the Politics of Culture', in Michael Levenson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 164.

4 Jean Moorcroft Wilson, 'Brothers in Arms: Siegfried Sassoon and the Long Shadow of Wilfred Owen', *The Guardian Saturday Review* (29 March 2003): 5.

5 Bernard Bergonzi, *Heroes' Twilight: A Study of the Literature of the Great War* (London, 1965), p. 107.

a Foxhunting Man. It is this very image which tempts many readers to cast aside *Memoirs* as a self-indulgent exercise in nostalgia. Nostalgic the novel certainly is; but it is debatable whether or not it is a really self-indulgent nostalgia.

Most of the critics writing about *Memoirs* concentrate on the decline of Victorian values during the First World War. Sandra M. Gilbert highlights the gender problems that came with the war, in which the 'glamour of battle dissipated and Victorian fantasies of historical heroism gave way to modernist visions of irony and unreality'.[6] Elaine Showalter stresses the pressure men were under at the front, not only the obvious pressure of the fighting, but more specifically pressure from the expectations of society: 'The poetic image of the Great War was one of strong, unreflective masculinity, embodied in the square, solid figure of General Haig, prepared by the poems of Kipling and the male adventure stories of G.R. Henty and Rider Haggard. For officers in particular, the cultural pressures to conform to these British ideals of stoic and plucky masculinity were extreme'.[7] She elaborates on the intricacies of shell shock and war neuroses which led to the decline of Victorian ideals of heroism and chivalry: 'the emotional disturbance produced by warfare itself, by chronic conditions of fear, tension, horror, disgust, and grief; and war neurosis was "an escape from an intolerable situation," a compromise negotiated by the psyche between the instinct of self-preservation and the inhibition against deception or flight, which were "rendered impossible by ideals of duty, patriotism, and honor"'.[8] The young men, brought up on Victorian morals and a literary feast of adventure stories about hardy manhood, realized once they were in the trenches that the reality of war was not glorious, but bloody and muddy, and they had to adapt their world-picture quickly in order to cope. And once they had returned home, they had to come to terms with the fact that the social balance had shifted there, too, largely due to the increasing emancipation of women.

The war also changed Sassoon's writing. Carol Shelton explains, '[g]one is the heroic posing colored by chivalric Victorian war imagery', a process which can be traced closely in Sassoon's poetry.[9] On first going out to France he produces poetry still very much in the heroic vein; but this gives way to biting sarcasm and bitter metaphors about the futility of the human sacrifice being made in the trenches. The transition from the eager innocence of the war volunteer to the bitterness of the war veteran is admirably described in his 1915 poem 'Absolution', where he uses a mock-heroic voice to describe the eagerness of the soldier new to the war: 'The anguish of the earth absolves our eyes/ Till beauty shines in all that we can see./ War is our scourge; yet war has made us wise,/ And, fighting for our freedom, we are free.'[10]

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6 Sandra M. Gilbert, 'Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War', in Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jensen, Sonya Michel and Margaret Collins Weitz (eds), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven, CT, 1987), p. 207.

7 Elaine Showalter, 'Rivers and Sassoon: The Inscription of Male Gender Anxieties', in Higonnet, Jensen, Michel and Weitz (eds), *Behind the Lines*, p. 63.

8 Showalter, 'Rivers and Sassoon', p. 64.

9 Carol Shelton, 'War Protest, Heroism, and Shellshock. Siegfried Sassoon: A Case Study', *Focus on Robert Graves and His Contemporaries* 1/13 (Winter 1992): 45.

10 Siegfried Sassoon, 'Absolution', in *The War Poems*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London, 1983), p. 15.

Sassoon himself commented later that 'People used to feel like this when they "joined up." … No one feels it when they "go out again"'.[11] To the consternation of many of his readers (who did not relish being confronted with brutal war truths in poetry), Sassoon's poetry shifted further and further from his earlier pastoral descriptions of nature towards the drama of war and death, often in ironic but no less vitriolic form. Bergonzi writes that 'his gifts were pre-eminently those of a satirist, and it was in satire that he excelled'.[12] It was Sassoon's own gentlemanly reserve which lent itself to the use of the satire found in his poetry. In this, he followed a proud literary tradition. The seventeenth-century poet John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, can be seen as one of Sassoon's literary ancestors. In 'The Maimed Debauchee' he uses vitriolic satire to attack a world in which social values are crumbling. Rochester's protagonist is an old libertine who compares himself to a 'brave admiral, in former war/ Deprived of force but pressed with courage still'.[13] Enjoying valour by proxy, the wasted ex-Casanova tries to urge young libertines on: 'Thus statesmanlike I'll saucily impose/ And safe from action valiantly advise,/ Sheltered in impotence urge you to blows.'[14] In 'The General', Sassoon uses the same tone. His General greets his troops cheerfully but makes sure to be nowhere too near to the actual action. He is depicted as moving in the opposite direction to the front, away from the battle. Sassoon's poem highlights the carelessness of the superior officer who does not consider that 'now the soldiers he smiled at are most of 'em dead' as a result of his own incompetence and that of his similarly careless staff.[15]

This is a far shout from Sassoon's early lyrical poems, such as 'Nimrod in September'. His experiences during the war had embittered him, especially where those giving orders were concerned. This dissatisfaction culminated in his famous statement against the war, which opened with the memorable sentence 'I am making this statement as an act of wilful defiance of military authority because I believe that the War is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it'.[16] Sassoon saw it as the main aim of his poetry to shake up his civilian readers, and to raise awareness of the day-to-day horrors of warfare. His use of bitter sarcasm and anger makes his poetry all the more powerful. He tried to undermine the alleged glory of war, and to make his readers aware that the soldiers at the front are not story-book heroes, but frightened men who can barely cope with what they see around them. His poems 'The Hero' and 'The One-Legged Man' hauntingly press this point. The first describes an officer lying to an old woman about her son's 'heroic' death, keeping the unpleasant truth from her: 'He thought how "Jack", cold-footed, useless swine,/ Had panicked down the trench that night the mine/ Went up at Wicked Corner; how

11 Sassoon, Comments on 'Absolution', p. 15.

12 Bergonzi, *Heroes' Twilight*, p. 105.

13 John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, 'The Maimed Debauchee', in *The Complete Works*, ed. Frank H. Ellis (London, 1994), p. 87, lines 1–2.

14 Wilmot, 'The Maimed Debauchee', lines 45–7.

15 Siegfried Sassoon, 'The General', in *Collected Poems* (London, 1947), p. 75, line 3. See also line 4: 'and we're cursing his staff for incompetent swine.'

16 Siegfried Sassoon, 'Statement Against the War (15th June 1917)', quoted in Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon*, p. 104.

he'd tried/ To get sent home, and how, at last, he died,/ Blown to small bits.'[17] The second poem depicts a soldier invalided out of France, viewing 'the August weald' to which he had returned, concluding with 'Safe with his wound, a citizen of life./ He hobbled blithely through the garden gate,/ And thought: "Thank God they had to amputate"'.[18] Sassoon shows that soldiers were happy even to sacrifice a limb if only that guaranteed them a return-ticket to 'Blighty'. His war-experiences also shaped his prose writing. But it is precisely the fact that he decides to deal with them differently in prose which makes *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man* such an intriguing novel.

While most critics agree that the First World War was a watershed in British social history, many condemn Sassoon's novel as an escapist celebration of nostalgia for Victorian values, which focuses on a privileged upper-class life rather than on the horrors of trench warfare. Christopher Lane accuses *Memoirs* of:

> constituting the past as a time of mythical happiness. Events are isolated and spun into a narrative so overlaid with sentiment that it almost excludes the traumatic events of 1914. Chapters comprise the description of memorable hunts or rounds of golf; adopting the archaisms – now clichés – of Romanticism. Sassoon virtually suspends the influence of the modern by reverting to scenes of pastoral tranquillity.[19]

While much of this is undoubtedly true, it is nevertheless a shortsighted condemnation. Instead, it can be argued that *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man* is not, as is often proclaimed, a reactionary, nostalgic novel, but a carefully constructed, almost modernist text. Fleishman writes that 'Sassoon wishes to maintain his native scenes – for all their numinousness in the memory – at the literal level, in preparation for the violent contrast he will draw between them and the war spectacle'.[20] But there is more. What one first took for reminiscences of pastoral dreams can eventually be recognized as a social critique: the horrors of the Great War show the futility of the tranquil pre-war world the book seems to be celebrating, and it thus suggests the impossibility of its future survival.

In order to contradict Lane's accusations of cultural nostalgia, sentimentalism and 'archaisms of Romanticism', Sassoon's work has to be put in its social, cultural and historical context. In the early twentieth century, pastoralism was still a popular topic. Bradbury writes that:

> the fact that the new society, with its impersonal relationships, its new species of sensibility and possibility, its rational onward momentum, was a half-controlled growth rather than a community or a culture perhaps explains the deep vein of rural nostalgia that runs through art … in the period, expressing itself in forms as various as General William Booth's rural colonies, the search for a yeoman ideal of greatness, and such self-dependent intellectuals as Edward Carpenter, making his sandals near Sheffield. The persistence of the rural or

17 Siegfried Sassoon, 'The Hero' (August 1916), in *The War Poems*, p. 49.

18 Siegfried Sassoon, 'The One-Legged Man' (August 1916), in *The War Poems*, p. 48.

19 Christopher Lane, 'In Defense of the Realm: Sassoon's Memoirs', *Raritan* 14/1 (Summer 1994): 93.

20 Avrom Fleishman, *Figures of Autobiography: The Language of Self-Writing in Victorian and Modern England* (Berkeley, CA, 1983), p. 340.

> organic image in literature runs deep, providing almost *the* essential alternative myth for the era.[21]

Even acclaimed modernist writers employed pastoralism in their work, often for their own critique of contemporary society. In *Howards End*, Forster expresses his fears for the countryside, with the big cities and industries infringing upon it. D.H. Lawrence's writing voices his concern about the end of rural England. In a letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith he laments that:

> when I drive across this country … I am so sad, for my country … which is now collapsing. … So much beauty and pathos of old things passing away and no new things coming. … the past, the great past, crumbling down, breaking down … under the weight of many exhausted lovely yellow leaves, that drift over the lawn, and over the pond, like the soldiers, passing away, into winter and the darkness of winter – no, I can't bear it. For the winter stretches ahead, where all vision is lost and all memory dies out.[22]

Lawrence's letter was written in November 1915, and his 'soldiers passing away into winter' clearly refers to the young men fighting and dying across the Channel. But winter is also a metaphor for the future, which, in Lawrence's eyes, is bleak, because it comes at the expense of old traditions. Forster and Lawrence were by no means alone in their fears. Many contemporaries, among them war poets such as Rupert Brooke, had been and were followers of the so-called idea of New Life, which advocated anti-industrialist, pro-agrarian and self-sufficient living.[23] In 1887, William Morris had already vented his pent-up frustration about industrialization, which had 'covered the merry green fields with the hovels of slaves and blighted the flowers and trees with poisonous gases, and turned rivers into sewers'.[24] Morris and many of his contemporaries rediscovered rural England, which they saw as 'a symbol of the country's unchanging essence', an attitude mirrored in much late nineteenth-century utopian writing, such as Butler's *Erewhon* and Morris's own *News from Nowhere*.[25]

Morris's 'unchanging essence' was always popular at times of national danger. Scruton explains that 'when war or other crises forced the English into consciousness of their historic ties, it was the country that was the object of their intensest feelings of community. In and around the two world wars books began to appear, addressed to the general reader, devoted to this or that aspect of the rural way of life. In almost all of them the assumption prevailed that somehow rural England was the essential

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21 Malcolm Bradbury, *The Social Context of Modern English Literature* (Oxford, 1971), p. 46.

22 D.H. Lawrence, 'Letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith (November 1915)', quoted in Bergonzi, *Heroes' Twilight*, p. 142.

23 For more information on the school of New Life see Jonathan Rutherford, *Forever England: Reflections on Masculinity and Empire* (London, 1997), p. 42.

24 William Morris, 'The Society of the Future', quoted in Rutherford, *Forever England*, p. 42.

25 Rutherford, *Forever England*, p. 51; for utopian writing of the time, see Bradbury, *The Social Context of English Literature*, p. 47.

England'.[26] Bell points out that Sassoon had the example of the grand master Thomas Hardy to emulate: 'Hardy himself was writing poetry through the first two decades of the century, and provided models for ironic and compassionate perception of the Great War by other poets. … His use of the English countryman *persona* … was consonant with the Georgian manner; an avatar of English pastoralism which was turned to both satiric and elegiac effect in the war poetry of Rupert Brooke and Wilfried Owen.'[27] Sassoon's admiration for Hardy, whose poems were his constant companion in the trenches, is well documented, and he honoured his idol in the dedication of his first major book of poetry. This was the beginning of a close friendship between the two writers, and Hardy was always one of the first to read and comment on Sassoon's work.[28]

These different influences might explain the use of the pastoral in Sassoon's novel. But his work can also be read as a careful, almost modernist construct, mainly because of its conscious juxtaposition of war and peace. Michael Levenson writes that '[t]he catastrophe of the First World War … [was] not simply looming on the outside as the destabilizing context of cultural Modernism; [it] penetrated the interior or artistic invention. [It] gave subjects to writers … and [it] also gave forms, forms suggested by … most horribly, the bodies broken in the war'.[29] John Hildebidle echoes this: 'Graves, Blunden, and Sassoon, as memoirists, are modernist in their effort to work out this response under conditions of unusual pain. As works of art their books are unlikely to challenge *Ulysses* or *Mrs. Dalloway*, but they stand … at the head of that tragically rich vein of twentieth-century writing which has its roots both in modernism and in atrocity: the literature of survival.'[30] Hence it can be argued that the war had given Sassoon his topic, and that he carefully constructed his work in such as way as to gain the biggest possible impact for the war narrative. If *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man* is read on its own, the war seems, indeed, marginalized. But if read in the context of the other two parts of the novel, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* and *Sherston's Progress*, the war begins to dominate. The initial descriptions, of rural England and of the joys of country pursuits, are carefully placed so as to enhance the horrors of war. In thrusting back the war memories and foregrounding descriptions of rural England in the first volume, Sassoon toys with his readers' expectations, and this gives *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man* a modernist touch. He cunningly uses the juxtaposition of two different worlds – pre-war, rural England versus the trenches – to make his own statement about society, by showing the futility of his pre-war existence, rather than merely nostalgically celebrating it.

Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man has a binary vision. On the one hand, we are shown peaceful, rural England, and such quintessential country pursuits as village

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26 Roger Scruton, *England: An Elegy* (London, 2000), p. 234.

27 Michael Bell, *The Context of English Literature, 1900–1930* (London, 1980), p. 68.

28 See Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon*, pp. 98, 131–2 and 183–4.

29 Michael Levenson, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, p. 4.

30 John Hildebidle, 'Neither Worthy nor Capable: the War Memoirs of Graves, Blunden, and Sassoon', in Robert Kiely and John Hildebidle (eds), *Modernism Reconsidered* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), p. 121.

cricket and foxhunting; on the other, we have Flanders and the trenches. In between, struggling to come to terms with the abrupt transition from one world to another, is George Sherston, country gentleman, who painfully realizes during the war that the world he has come to defend has become unreal.

History holds that the trenches of Flanders saw, quite literally, the death of the English gentleman and the end of an era; that, in the trenches, young gentlemen realized the futility of a genteel upbringing and a classical education. Fair play, learnt on the playing fields of Eton, Rugby and Harrow, did not help them win the war. However, it can be argued that gentlemanly values were after all vital for survival in the trenches, and that a gentleman's education provided a good basis for exactly that, survival in battle. There are countless examples of fair play practised during the war: unspoken armistices between the enemies on certain days; impromptu fraternizing between 'Fritz' and 'Tommie' (for example the 1914 Christmas truce); moments of unrestrained public-school spirit, such as the kicking of a football across the field during an attack. Robert Graves writes of having spared a bathing German soldier, because he 'did not like the idea of shooting a naked man'.[31] Despite the horrors of shell shock, which might affect anyone, regardless of class or upbringing, many young officers found that their Spartan public-school upbringing had equipped them with enough stiff upper lip to pull through. Peter Parker writes that 'educated in a gentlemanly tradition of loyalty, honour, chivalry, Christianity, patriotism, sportsmanship and leadership, public-school boys could be regarded as suitable officer material in any way'.[32] Importantly, public school had prepared its pupils to be unflappable in every situation, or at least to *pretend* to be unperturbed. This, as P.H. Philditch shows, had its echo in language, where 'nothing is "horrible." That word is never used in public. Things are "darned unpleasant," "rather nasty," or, if very bad, simply "damnable"'.[33] Hildebidle argues that, for Robert Graves, 'in terms of protective repression of instinct, Graves' upbringing [he was – mostly unhappily – at Charterhouse] was really not so bad a preparation. It taught him … to turn mental anguish into action. … His education and heritage allow him to "masquerade as a gentleman," as later he will have to masquerade as an officer'.[34] Sassoon had been prepared in a similar way: romping around with his brothers and energetic mother; horse riding and foxhunting; and later preparatory school and Marlborough. His fictional alter ego George Sherston has to overcome fear of horses, of riding and of jumping, to become an efficient equestrian. Each step in that direction makes young Sherston feel more self-assured, and helps convince him that he can achieve things, once he puts his mind to them. Feeling incompetent during his first weeks in the army training camp, he soon realizes that his adeptness with horses gives him status among his fellow soldiers, which in turn boosts his self-confidence. Just as, in

31 Robert Graves, *Good-Bye to All That* (London, 1971), p. 175.

32 Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public-School Ethos* (London, 1987), p. 17.

33 Quoted in Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 2000), p. 181.

34 Hildebidle, 'Neither Worthy nor Capable', p. 106. See also Graves' *Undertones of War*, for his conscious efforts at overcoming fear and emotional instability by rock climbing and boxing.

boyhood, he was determined to become a good rider, so as a soldier he is determined to be valorous in battle. This ability to overcome fear and, to put it in stable-jargon, to drive at the highest obstacles, helps him during the war.

Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man comprises 313 pages, but only seventy of those deal with the war. The first 243 pages set the scene. They depict the untroubled rural idyll of Butley in Kent, George Sherston's childhood and youth, and his initiation into the pleasures of riding and foxhunting. Terms such as 'gentleman', 'sporting gentleman', 'sportsman' and 'gentleman's servant' loom large in the narrative and set the tone, followed, in *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, by expressions such as 'temporary gentlemen'(indicating officers created from the ranks, *MIO*, p. 128), 'officer and gentleman' (*MIO*, p. 227) and 'gentlemanly traditions of the regiment' (*MIO*, p. 242). George Sherston, orphan, grows up under the watchful eye of his over-protective Aunt Evelyn in her small but genteel home, which has enough servants, including groom and stable boys, to mark it as clearly an upper-middle-class establishment. This first impression is later reinforced when the adolescent Sherston is inclined neither to study purposefully nor to take up a profession, but rather decides to remain a gentleman of leisure.

Of his childhood, Sherston explains that it 'was a queer and not altogether happy one', as he was 'shy and solitary' (*MFM*, p. 9). Growing up in his aunt's mostly female household, deprived of the company of other boys, privately instructed by an elderly tutor, he potters about aimlessly until coming under the auspices of groom Tom Dixon, mentioned on the first page of the narrative, and thus clearly a pivotal figure in the text. Dixon, according to Sherston, 'never lost sight of his intention to make a sportsman of me' (*MFM*, p. 10), by coaching him in cricket and riding, and introducing him to the pleasures of the hunt. Dixon also makes Sherston – always in need of gentle guidance – aware of class distinctions and their respective standings: 'And since he was … "a perfect gentleman's servant," he never allowed me to forget my position as "a little gentleman:" he always knew exactly when to become discreetly respectful. In fact, he "knew his place"' (*MFM*, p. 10). The tone is set immediately: the little 'gentleman' on the one side of the social divide, the servant on the other. Steadily but unobtrusively, Dixon sets about constructing his 'little gentleman' according not only to his personal perceptions but also to society's expectations regarding a country gentleman: as a good horseman and a passionate foxhunter.[35] The only female character of any consequence in the book, Aunt Evelyn, is largely unaware of these pressures. But she is the odd one out in more than one respect: she functions as the antithesis to patriarchal society, and, as such, hardly deserves a place in the homosocial world of Sherston and Dixon, or in the stables, where even the horses are referred to as 'perfect gentlem[e]n' (*MFM*, p. 151).

Dixon clearly gives some structure to young Sherston's aimless existence. He goes about moulding Sherston into a sporting gentleman with great cunning: '"Stick your knees in, sir," he said, adding, "I can see you'll make a rider all right." He had

35 Oscar Wilde lampooned those expectations in 1893: 'The English country gentleman galloping after a fox – the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable.' Oscar Wilde, *A Woman of No Importance* (London, 1996), p. 11.

never called me "sir" before, and my heart warmed toward him as I straightened my back and inwardly resolved to do him credit' (*MFM*, p. 17). This carefully placed compliment, coupled with the titled attribute of gentlemanliness, *Sir*, makes Sherston self-consciously aware of his position – and ambitious; he cannot possibly disappoint the groom's (and thus society's) expectations. In Dixon, he has also found the first person to look up to. Male bonding is one of the most forceful themes in the novel, and this echoes Sassoon's own homosexual leanings.

The history of Sassoon's homosexuality is one of denial and repression. Although aware early on of feeling differently, he did not admit his sexual preferences, even to himself, until well into his mid twenties. His biographer describes 'Sassoon at twenty-five years of age … [as] not the happy-go-lucky person of earlier years. … There was an increasing awareness that life for him was "an empty thing". He was experiencing "great perplexity and unhappiness"'.[36] He found the source of this unhappiness in June 1910, when a friend introduced him to the writing of Edward Carpenter. Reading *The Intermediate Sex* helped Sassoon come to terms with his own sexuality. He even wrote to Carpenter to thank him:

> Until I read *The Intermediate Sex*, I knew absolutely nothing of the subject, … but life was an empty thing, and what idea I had about homosexuality was absolutely prejudiced, and I was in such a groove that I couldn't allow myself to be what I wished to be, and the intense attraction I felt for my own sex was almost a subconscious thing and my antipathy for women a mystery to me. … I cannot say what it has done for me. I am a different being and have a definite aim in life and something to lean on … .[37]

Understanding his emotions was one thing; finding like-minded men another. The notorious Queensberry Trial, which ended Wilde's career, had taken place only 15 years earlier. Ten years before that, in 1885, the Labouchere Amendment had 'put a complete ban on acts of "gross indecency" between men, not only in public, but in private'.[38] It would be 80 years before homosexuality would be legally permitted in England and Wales. Sassoon had to come to terms with the fact that he had either to deny his preferences, or to move in a secret world to find kindred spirits. His main problem was that the men he admired were all stoutly heterosexual, and would have been appalled had he revealed his passion for them.[39] He attempted to suppress his desires, and this sense of repressed emotion surfaces in *Memoirs* in the shape of Sherston's shy hero worship of other men: Dixon, the groom; Denis Milden, fanatic foxhunter, first admired from afar but soon in a close, blossoming friendship; his old schoolfellow Stephen Colwood, passionate about horses, hunting and point-to-point racing. Later, in the army, these first close friends are replaced by Dick Tiltwood,

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36 Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon*, p. 42.

37 Siegfried Sassoon, 'Letter to Edward Carpenter (11 July 1910),' in Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon*, p. 44.

38 Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885* (Buckingham, 1995), p. 1.

39 One of them was Robert Hugh Hanmer, the son of a clergyman. Sassoon was so infatuated with him that he even entered into an understanding with his sister Dorothy to remain close to Robert. See Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon*, pp. 52–3 and 60 for further details.

David Cromlech and Dr. Rivers. Sherston's world has no space for women: neither the stables nor the kennels, nor later the trenches are places for women, and the only females who do appear in the novel play subordinate roles, such as Aunt Evelyn, the maids in the house, or, later, the odd nurse in field hospitals. This attitude is constantly reinforced in the novel, in particular through comments such as '[Dixon's] impassive face made not the slightest reference to yesterday's calamity and this tactful silence more than ever assured me of his infinite superiority to those chattering females in the kitchen' (*MFM*, p. 23). The misogynist gender divide in this statement is staggering: the groom, he of the manly world of the stables, is considered superior to the women who talk and fuss too much in their traditional space of the house; and not merely the house, but, more marginalizing still, the kitchen.

In *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man*, the three years between Sherston's first riding lesson and his first hunt are dedicated to the conscious fashioning of his persona as a country gentleman. Practical lessons in the saddle are balanced by an acquisition of theoretical knowledge, represented by the novels of Surtees, which fill Sherston with heady notions about the kind of noble hunting gentlemen he is impatient to emulate. The adult Sherston admits to this conscious self-fashioning: 'my knowledge of the chase was derived from two sources: firstly, the things I had heard in conversation with Dixon; and secondly, a vague but diligent perusal of the novels of Surtees' and 'I had never seen a race in my life; nor had I ever been to a meet of the hounds. But I assiduously studied the novels of Surtees' (*MFM*, pp. 19; 29). He ironically confesses that his knowledge had been entirely second-hand. There are several instances of hindsight in the novel, with an older Sherston belittling his younger self. These instances highlight Sassoon's own heightened social awareness: he recognizes the futility, the shambling existence of his pre-war self, and attacks it ironically.

When Sherston finally makes it to his first hunt, the experience seems in every respect to equal what he has read in Surtees. Though worried about making a blunder – 'I was conscious, too, that Dixon was regarding me with an unusually critical eye' (*MFM*, p. 30) – he is eager to embrace this new world. He is also aware of the class-consciousness in Dixon: 'Once we had arrived, Dixon seemed to become a different Dixon, so dignified and aloof that I scarcely dared speak to him. Of course I knew what it meant: I was now his "young gentleman" and he was only the groom who had brought me to "have a look at the hounds"' (*MFM*, p. 31).

It is during this hunt that he first sets eyes on Denis Milden, who is described as the epitome of the young sporting gentleman: perfectly attired, perfectly at ease, with the slightest hint of arrogance because he is aware of his effortless appearance.[40] The scene recalls Castiglione and his notions of *sprezzatura*, the importance of being able to impress without appearing to be trying too hard. It also emphasizes the literal side of self-fashioning: Denis Milden is represented as the apogee of the hunting gentleman, and, in keeping with the saying 'It is the clothes that make the man', that is due largely to correct apparel. The passage also alerts us to Dixon's approval of Milden, which heightens Sherston's awareness that Milden is somebody to be emulated. For Sherston, this means that his theoretical hunting knowledge, acquired through reading, can now be replaced by personal experience. Milden functions as a

40 See *MFM*, p. 34.

real-life example for him, and he can consequently fashion himself according to an approved ideal.

Sherston's preoccupation with a boy he has seen only from afar is curious. It could be read as a lonely boy's desperate wish for a friend of the same age and with the same interests. But it is also an indicator of homoeroticism. After his first sighting, he admits that 'already I was weaving Master Milden into my day dreams, and soon he had become my inseparable companion in all my imagined adventures. … It was the first time that I experienced a feeling of wistfulness for someone I wanted to be with' (*MFM*, p. 40). In Sassoon's private life, he had to repress several similar infatuations. He needed the help of other homosexual men, E.T. Dent and Robert Baldwin Ross among them, to become a part of London's homosexual network, and eventually to 'cross the boundary between desire and fulfilment'.[41] Sassoon was 32 years old when he embarked on his first homosexual relationship with Gabriel Atkin who was eleven years his junior. Atkin was the first in a succession of younger men with whom Sassoon was infatuated. One of his later relationships was with Stephen Tennant, one of the Bright Young People, whose set Evelyn Waugh and Anthony Powell were to join a few years later. Incidentally, Powell, in his autobiography, remembers the 'friendship', as he delicately terms it, between 'Siegfried Sassoon (then in his forties, of melancholy saturnine appearance) and Stephen Tennant (at that moment the prettiest of young men)', and recalls his friend Edith Sitwell's having referred to them as 'the Old Earl and Little Lord Fauntleroy'.[42]

In *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man* it takes 11 years before Sherston re-encounters Milden, and their intense friendship blossoms. The language Sherston uses to describe Milden is glowing: he is the ultimate sporting gentleman; people jostle for a place next to him and admire him from close up and far away alike. Elaborate language like this expresses the speaker's infatuation – Sherston admits that his 'heart glows with gratitude' whenever Milden acknowledges him, and that 'staying at the Kennels was the most significant occasion my little world could offer me' (*MFM*, pp. 207; 208). No other man comes close to Milden's perfect gentlemanliness. Among other things he is referred to as 'our amateur huntsman' (*MFM*, p. 202) – this in strict distinction from a professional, in a social world where amateurism is equated with gentlemanliness. More fulsome praise of the new master comes from Dixon, who 'had always considered him the pattern of what a young gentleman ought to be' (*MFM*, p. 199). Sherston demurely acknowledges his friend's superiority in every undertaking, and subjugates his will to, as he sees it, a superior being: 'I gazed at him with humble expectancy' and 'I saw it entirely through the eyes of Denis' (*MFM*, pp. 197; 225).

Sherston's friendship with Milden is never described as anything but a friendship, albeit a friendship in which the one friend idolizes the other. But the homoerotic undertones are obvious, especially in the description of Sherston's six-month sojourn with Denis in the Midlands: he is treated 'extremely civil … on account of my *close* connection with the new Master' (*MFM*, p. 225; emphasis mine) and enjoys their

41 Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon*, p. 64.

42 Anthony Powell, *To Keep the Ball Rolling: The Memoirs of Anthony Powell* (London, 1983), p. 135.

evenings together in the Kennels, which evoke almost conjugal bliss: 'Life at the Kennels appeared to me almost perfect, especially when I was sitting with Denis in the little room in the huntsman's house' (*MFM*, p. 225).

All of Sherston's narrative is preoccupied with sporting pursuits in his rural idyll. Foxhunting – a winter activity – is counterbalanced by another gentleman's sport – cricket – in the summer. Here, as in the case of riding and hunting, Dixon coaches Sherston towards becoming what society considers a proper country gentleman. It is only in an aside that we hear Sherston also attended a public school and spent a few terms at Cambridge, both in themselves in perfect keeping with a gentleman's upbringing. All we hear about his time at school is that he 'had won a place in [his] House Eleven' (*MFM*, p. 60); about his time at university we learn only that he leaves prematurely without taking a degree – and without having had any intention of taking one in the first place. Of his younger, carefree self Sherston writes with underlying irony: 'Why should a young man who has inherited a net income of about six hundred a year find it easy or necessary to imagine himself as ten or twenty years older?' (*MFM*, p. 79). This attitude was in keeping with gentlemanly values inherited from the Victorians, wherein it was expected that a young man of independent means would not work for his living. Sherston's life remains focused mainly on cricket, golf and foxhunting, and the well-meaning lawyer who reprimands him for neglecting his education and future prospects is dismissed as an interfering 'silly old blighter' (*MFM*, p. 79). But on account of his foxhunting and riding success, Sherston begins to live above his means, and to be too class-conscious. He admits that 'poverty was a thing I hated to look in the face … and I resented the notion of all those squalid slums spreading out into the uninfected green country', and he becomes 'conscious that we had a social position to keep up' (*MFM*, p. 81). He is resentful of what he terms the 'newly rich, ill-conditioned, and foul-mouthed', especially those specimens of that kind encountered during hunt-meets – 'What with the vulgarly horsey cut and colour of his clothes and the bumptious and bullying manners which matched them, he was no ornament to the Dumborough Hunt' (*MFM*, p. 120). This again shows that the right clothes were important for acceptance in the ranks of country gentlemen. To keep up appearances, Sherston has his sporting clothes tailor-made in London, and he takes up golf and smoking a pipe; he also has to have more than just one horse.[43] He does not realize that his extravagant behaviour is beginning to embarrass his aunt financially: she has to resort to selling off her jewellery to pay for his horses.[44] Sherston is trapped in a vicious circle. Being a country gentleman for him comes hand in hand with a certain lifestyle. The fact that his aunt has to sell her rings to make this life possible shows that he is living above his means. It also shows that, although he might have acquired the outward trappings of a gentleman, he does not have the inner qualities, since he does not even feel guilty about his aunt's financial sacrifices. Again, the older Sherston criticizes his younger self as 'ignorant' and 'callow' (*MFM*, p. 101). With hindsight, Sherston knows that there are more things to life, and more qualities to being a gentleman, than a tailor-made hunting coat and several horses. In this, Sassoon's depiction of the gentleman's progress towards

43 See *MFM*, pp. 116, 80, 119 and 154 respectively.

44 See *MFM*, p. 159.

the truth is reminiscent of Dickens's Pip in *Great Expectations*. Both protagonists initially fall into the trap of valuing the gentlemanly lifestyle above a man's inner worth. Both of them learn through disaster. With this, both Dickens and Sassoon can be seen as ironically criticizing their contemporary societies, in which too much emphasis is placed on appearance.

Sherston does not realize that the months with Milden in the Midlands are the last of world peace, and also of an old world-order. He reminisces that 'I watched them and listened to them with a comfortable feeling that there was something which no political upheaval could interrupt' (*MFM*, pp. 226–7). His time with the Packlestone hunt is Sherston's farewell to his old life. With the arrival of spring, he returns to Butley and sells the horses he can no longer afford. Four months later, he finds himself in an army training camp. There is no warning of the impending war in the narrative. The eighth chapter ends with Sherston's return to Butley from the Midlands after his time with the Packlestone hunt; the ninth opens with him as trooper in the Yeomanry. There are no hints about political problems in the world, nor an open statement about the outbreak of war. This shows how oblivious Sherston had been to the brewing of the political storm. Hunting and the kennels are his priorities. This emphasizes not only the exclusivity of his relationship with Milden, in which there is no place for anything else, but also the exclusivity of his own life, dedicated to becoming a country gentleman.

The war turns Sherston's life upside down. From the unrestrained freedom and the exhilaration of the hunt, he is thrust into regimental army life, and the mayhem of the trenches. Paul Fussel writes: 'the joyous comings and goings of horses and riders which make the early part of the book a celebration of utterly unrestrained movement stop abruptly, to be replaced by their opposite, stasis in fixed trenches', although he also points out ironically that 'the book has begun with fox-hunting; it ends with Boche-hunting', which indicates that the overall theme of the novel does not change.[45] Fussell's is an important comment. The first part of the book has made the reader accustomed to the outdoors, to hunting and chasing for sport, to fresh air and freedom. The loss of that very liberty is felt all the more in the confinement of a trench.

Sherston considers training for the war to be an exciting adventure, which can be seen in phrases such as 'being in the Army was very much like being back at school' and 'I had serious aspirations to heroism in the field' (*MFM*, p. 244). His heroism is still steeped in Victorian notions. The actual physical dangers of the war seem very remote: 'sitting in the sunshine one morning early in September, I ruminated on my five weeks' service as a trooper in the Yeomanry. Healthier than I'd ever been before, I sat on the slope of a meadow a few miles from Canterbury…' and, crucially, 'for me, so far, the War had been a mounted infantry picnic in perfect weather' (*MFM*, pp. 243; 244). The key sentence of the whole novel comes a few paragraphs later: 'Reality seemed a long way off' (*MFM*, p. 246). This sentence characterizes Sherston's life up to this point: a sheltered existence as a member of a small élite, spent in horse riding, foxhunting and playing cricket, without a care in the world. The awakening is bound to be hard, as the facts of life begin to dawn on him. Far

45 Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, pp. 96, 95.

away is the attitude he had only two years ago – 'Europe was nothing but a name to me. I couldn't even bring myself to read about it in the daily paper' (*MFM*, p. 195).

His learning process begins with the sudden realization that his horse, Cockbird, mobilized with him, 'was now my only tangible link with the peaceful past' (*MFM*, p. 244); McKenzie writes that 'Sherston brings his horse into the army as part of his instant attempt to reassure himself the military world is just an extension of his familiar world'.[46] Once Cockbird is transferred to a superior officer, the last palpable link with the past vanishes, and Sherston finally realizes that the 'life-learned landscape' he has spent his life in 'was now threatened by barbaric invasion' (*MFM*, p. 248). The danger signals become ever clearer when Sherston, out exercising a horse, takes a serious fall over some hidden wire in a hedge. Similar accidents during his happy hunting days had never resulted in injury. The accident therefore points towards the coming dangers. Nevertheless, it is now that we as readers become aware that Sassoon had placed earlier barbed wire warnings into the text: during one hunt, the riders stumble over some hidden wire. This gives more support to the idea that Sassoon's novel is a careful construct: warnings of things to come are there throughout the text, but it is up to the reader to heed them, or not.

As Sherston's world turns from Arcadian paradise to trench-reality, it begins to disintegrate for him. News from old friends is scarce, though a welcome link with the past, and, when it comes, it makes him reminisce. He understands that the past inexorably falls away. Denis Milden has disappeared into a cavalry regiment and, for the remainder of the trilogy, is not heard of again. Stephen Colwood is killed in action. Tom Dixon dies of pneumonia in the battle zone. His old cohort vanishes. Relationships which had taken Sherston years to build are destroyed in a few days or weeks by the relentless war. So while it is undoubtedly true that only 70 pages of the first volume are dedicated to the war, their impact is decisive. Another victim of the war is Dick Tiltwood, the new epitome of masculinity and gentlemanliness for Sherston – 'Generations of upright country gentlemen had made Dick Tiltwood what he was, and he had arrived at manhood in the nick of time to serve his country in what he naturally assumed to be a just and glorious war' (*MFM*, p. 269). In his description of Tiltwood, Sherston's homoerotic hero worship comes to the fore again. His beauty is made out to resemble an angel: 'his face surprised me by its candour and freshness. He had the obvious good looks which go with fair hair and firm features, but it was the radiant integrity of his expression which astonished me' (*MFM*, p. 268), or at least a knight in shining armour: 'I glanced at Dick and thought what a young Galahad he looked' (*MFM*, p. 286). This does not read like an objective description of a new brother-in-arms; it is clearly the language of somebody smitten, by youth, beauty and innocence. Dick Tiltwood is a representation of the real-life David Cuthbert Thomas. Roberts writes that '[t]he shared danger, the mutual involvement created bonds and released emotions which under other conditions would have remained dormant'.[47] This point is confirmed by Rudyard Kipling, who wrote in 1915 that

46 M-L. McKenzie, 'Memories of the Great War: Graves, Sassoon, and Findley', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 55/4 (Summer 1986): 403.

47 Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon*, p. 62.

the war encouraged 'a brotherhood more intimate than the ties of blood'.[48] Thomas was another young man with whom Sassoon was infatuated, and he suffered greatly when Thomas was killed in action only a few months later: 'Today I knew what it means to find the soul washed pure with tears, and the load of death was lifted from my heart. So I wrote his name in chalk on the beech-tree stem, and left a garland of ivy there, and a yellow primrose for his yellow hair and kind grey eyes, my dear, my dear'.[49] Sassoon's is not merely a sexual infatuation with a younger and handsome man, but a desperate, and so far unsuccessful search for companionship, for a soul-mate amid the destruction of war. Platonic friendships and the admiration of young men were always important for him. Roberts explains that 'Sassoon preferred the platonic but the physical desire was persistent'.[50] The problem was to find a happy combination of the two, but in that Sassoon was constantly disappointed: where he found the platonic fulfilment, he suffered from the repression of the physical – as in his admiration of Robert Hanmer or David Thomas; where he found physical relief, he missed the linking of souls, the feeling of having found a kindred spirit – as with Gabriel Atkin or Stephen Tennant. Gentlemanly values were important for Sassoon in his quest for the perfect man; he was aware of class and status in that respect. The attributes of the perfect gentleman had to be coupled with physical beauty and intellectual alertness. If those factors were missing, Sassoon suffered. His relationship with Gabriel Atkin, for example, was doomed because of Gabriel's 'flimsy attitude to life'.[51]

In *Memoirs of George Sherston*, all the friendships, despite their obvious homoerotic undertone, at least *seem* platonic. This is a crucial point for Sassoon's conception of sexuality, of himself and of gentlemanliness. He *might* have felt that actual consummation of male-male desires sullied masculinity and, consequently, gentlemanliness. A homosexual relationship was officially against the law; it had to be conducted in hiding. And the media and society perceived homosexuality as effeminate, as something that contradicted prevailing notions of masculinity. The men Sassoon describes in *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man* as perfect gentlemen – Denis Milden, Stephen Colwood, Dick Tiltwood – also seem sexually unattainable, and this elevates them even higher in their gentlemanly status.

When he buries his latest friend and hero, Dick, Sherston realizes that his world has changed for good. 'I knew death then', he exclaims, and points out that even the 'sky was angry with a red smoky sunset' (*MFM*, pp. 304; 303). He begins to doubt the reasons for the war: 'England wasn't what it used to be' (*MFM*, p. 299).[52] The idyllic world he grew up in, and which he had been so eager to defend, has ceased to exist; his riding trophies, once his pride and joy, have lost their lustre – 'point to point cups shone, but without conviction' – and, most importantly, 'my past was wearing a bit thin' (*MFM*, p. 299).

48 Rudyard Kipling, *France at War* (London, 1915), p. 66.

49 Quoted in Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon*, p. 76.

50 Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon*, p. 145.

51 Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon*, p. 161.

52 This is later repeated almost verbatim: 'I began to suspect that England wasn't quite what it used to be' (*MIO*, p. 91).

The more Sherston becomes accustomed to life in the trenches, the more he distances himself from his pre-war self, and from the world he used to live in. It is here that the paradox of the text lies: Sassoon both *celebrates* and *questions* a world order. He does not condemn it; but the war changes his own attitude towards it. While, years after the war, he still recalls it fondly, he realizes that his is a yearning for something irrevocably gone. As such, his nostalgia is reflexive, and even interpretative.

Englishness is one of the key themes of the novel, and it colours Sassoon's notions of gentlemanliness – a gentlemanliness closely linked to the land which had produced it. A clue for this lies in Sassoon's choice of name for his protagonist: George, the chivalric, dragon-slaying patron saint of England, and Sherston, 'from a small village on the southern boundaries of the Cotswolds, which would link the character to fox-hunting and point-to-pointing'.[53] The description of landscape is given great prominence in the novel. The beauty of the Kentish countryside stands in stark contrast to the devastated warscape in Flanders. Throughout the three books, Sherston describes the landscape and his aunt's home in Arcadian tones: 'Looking back across the years I listen to the summer afternoon cooing of my aunt's white pigeons. … I remember, too, the smell of strawberry jam being made. … The large rambling garden, with its Irish yews and sloping paths and wind-buffeted rose arches. … The quince tree which grew beside the little pond was the only quince tree in the world' (*MFM*, pp. 24–5). The longing for peace and tranquility in this passage is evident: white pigeons symbolize peace; home-made preserves convey a sense of homeliness, of contentment. In the war section of *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man*, Sherston reports the arrival of parcels at the front with home-made jam from his aunt. The sweet taste of it is solace and sustenance for the battle-wearied soldiers. Sherston recalls how one of the men 'gazed affectionately at the coloured label, which represented a cherry-growing landscape. The label was a talisman which carried his mind safely to the home counties of England' (*MFM*, p. 306). The term 'Home Counties' acquires a new meaning here with a clear emphasis on *home*, highlighting the soldiers' homesickness and longing for peace. It is always small, very personal things which trigger memories of home and of the past. In *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, it is the feeling of 'the pipe and tobacco pouch in my pocket' which 'made me less forlorn'; a book of poems was 'a comfort … for Thomas Hardy's England was between its covers'; and an evening march in the twilight which, no doubt, blocked out the sight of some of the carnage surrounding him, 'remind[ed] me of April evenings in England and the Butley cricket field' (*MIO*, pp. 23; 43; 154).

53 Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon*, p. 207. Interestingly, Eric Blair's choice of his pen-name George Orwell ran along similar lines: George, possibly for the patron saint of England, Orwell for a river in East Anglia. In Sassoon's case, the choice of name is also further proof of the underlying homoeroticism of the novel: Sherston in the Cotswolds was the area where he had often ridden with Norman Loder, the real-life Denis Milden, (see Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon*, p. 31). But Roberts points out that there was yet another reason for the choice of name: 'Sherston Magna was and remains a rural idyll on the north Wiltshire plain. It was also the land of the Byams … Their descendant Glen Byam Shaw was the author's muse' (Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon*, 207). The actor Byam Shaw was Sassoon's partner during the composition of *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man*.

In the muddiest trenches, Sherston and his fellow soldiers conjure up the English countryside, cottage gardens and apple orchards, in order to help them forget the war around them.[54] Sassoon here applied a technique also used by many other British war writers, the most prominent among them Edmund Blunden in his *Undertones of War*, in which he tellingly describes himself as 'a harmless young shepherd in a soldier's coat'.[55] Fussell explains that 'recourse to the pastoral is an English mode of both fully gauging the calamities of the Great War and imaginatively protecting oneself against them'.[56] In 1917, Edward Hutton admitted that the 'England of my heart … a great country of hill and valley, moorland and marsh, full of woodlands, meadows and all manners of flowers, and everywhere set with steadings and dear homesteads, old farms and churches of grey stone or flint' existed only in his imagination.[57] But thinking about the peaceful and tranquil countryside helped the soldiers remember what they were fighting for. Sherston recalls:

> I was meditating about England, visualizing a grey day down in Sussex; dark green woodlands with pigeons circling above the tree-tops; dogs barking, cocks crowing, and all the casual trappings and twinklings of the countryside. I thought of the huntsman walking out in his long white coat with the hounds. … It was for all that, I supposed, that I was in the front-line with soaked feet, trench mouth, and feeling short of sleep. … (*MIO*, p. 44)

Jarring uncomfortably with these reminiscences of the green and pleasant land is the reality of the landscape surrounding the trenches: 'The worn landscape looked parched and shabby; only the poppies made harsh spots of red' (*MIO*, p. 80).

Years, if not decades after the war, these thoughts of the lush pre-war English countryside still sustain the veterans, and should consequently be interpreted as more than mere nostalgic and reactionary memories of a time past. But it is important to consider other aspects too. Christopher Lane, for example, raises an important warning voice: 'while numerous examples attest to a contrary social history, Edwardian Britain is thus *recalled* as a period of untroubled peace and harmony'.[58] This distinction importantly shows that pre-war England is persistently held up and hailed as the epitome of home, the green and pleasant land for which men gladly sacrificed their lives. This attitude gives rise to a myth, and turns the war into a convenient scapegoat for a general slippage in standards.

Sassoon certainly does recall pre-war England as a land of untroubled peace and harmony. And for the rest of his life it is a nice, soothing memory to go back to. But he is realist enough to understand that this pre-war world has disappeared.

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54 See, for example, *MFM*, pp. 76–7, *MIO*, pp. 70–1 and 165–6. For Sassoon's construction of a rural Englishness, see also my '"I was meditating about England": The Importance of Rural England for the Construction of "Englishness"', in Robert Phillips and Helen Brocklehurst (eds), *History, Nationhood & the Question of Britain* (Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 375–85.

55 Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War* (London, 1950), p. 209.

56 Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 235.

57 Edward Hutton, 'England of My Heart', in Ernest Rhys (ed.), *The Old Country: A Book of Love and Praise of England* (London, 1917), pp. 204–5.

58 Lane, 'In Defense of the Realm': 92.

In *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man*, Sherston realizes, while on home-leave, that the ideal image he has formed of England does not conform to reality. England, and Butley in particular, are not what they used to be, and the decline does not stop at his aunt's doorstep: 'I visited the stables. Stagnation had settled there; nettles were thick under the apple-trees and the old mowing-machine pony grazed in shaggy solitude. In Dixon's little harness room, saddles were getting mouldy and there were rust-spots on the bits and stirrup-irons which he had kept so bright' (*MIO*, p. 94). Everything he once cherished is falling to pieces, and he himself has neither the energy nor the will to rectify things, to pick up a broom and sweep the yard, to polish the stirrup-irons or oil the saddles.

During a day out with the Ringwell Hunt, Sherston ponders that 'staring at the dim brown landscape I decided that the War was worth while if it was being carried on to safeguard this kind of thing. Was it? I wondered' (*MIO*, p. 102). He has recognized and accepted defeat: his old world no longer exists. It is not only that he sees decline all around him. More than that, it is the preponderant feeling that he no longer belongs anywhere but in the mud and dirt of the trenches.[59] The war is destroying not only what he loved about the English countryside, but also, and on a personal level more importantly, his enjoyment of what is left of it. He now knows two worlds: the tranquil one of the pre-war English countryside, and the brutal, filthy reality of the trenches. Being torn between two worlds causes Sherston to experience a fragmentation of the self. Feeling 'caddishly estranged and cynical' (*MIO*, p. 193), he realizes that having been to that second world has for ever destroyed his enjoyment of the first, even though he still needs to evoke it to keep his sanity. The same goes for the Victorian values of heroism and chivalry. He ponders that 'chivalry … had been mowed down and blown up in July, August, and September, and its remnants had finished the year's "crusade" in a morass of torment and frustration' (*MIO*, p. 117). He understands just how sheltered his previous existence had been, when he knew only 'little … of the enormous world beyond that valley and those low green hills' (*MFM*, p. 53). After a few months in the trenches, he has to add that 'in 1917 I was only beginning to learn that life, for the majority of the population, is an unlovely struggle against unfair odds, culminating in a cheap funeral' (*MIO*, p. 150). War, he realizes, treats all soldiers alike, no matter what class or past, and is a great leveller of social barriers.

This introspection continues in *Sherston's Progress*, when Sherston, while at Slateford, the army hospital (representing the real-life Craiglockhart where Sassoon spent several months), admits that 'my talks with Rivers had increased my awareness of the limitations of my pre-war life. … He had set me on the right road and made me feel that if the War were to end to-morrow I should be starting on a new life's journey in which point-to-point races and cricket matches would no longer be supremely important and a strenuous effort must be made to take some small share in the real work of the world' (*SP*, p. 42). On the larger social scale, this indicates that Sherston has come to see, if not the futility of his existence as a country gentleman, then at least the emptiness of it, and he is henceforth willing to work for the good of the

59 See also *MIO*, p. 189, and *SP*, p. 19: 'reality was on the other side of the Channel, surely.'

society he has so long taken for granted. The world after the war will be a different place; it has already changed beyond recognition. The concluding words of the novel are symptomatic of the time they were phrased in: 'There was no future except "the rest of the War," and I didn't want that. My knight-errantry about the war had fizzled out in more ways than one, and I couldn't go back to being the same as I was before it started. The "good old days" had been pleasant enough in their way, but what could a repetition of them possibly lead to?' (*SP*, p. 149).

Sassoon became a full-time writer after the war. He gave up foxhunting, and rode only occasionally. That all belonged to his life before the war. But he still lived in and roamed the countryside. He happily submitted to the label of 'Hermit of Heytesbury', and found consolation and solace in country life.[60] Fellow writer Anthony Powell, living in close vicinity to Sassoon in Somerset, visited him at Heytesbury House in the autumn of 1963, and afterwards noted in his diaries that inside the house 'life seemed to have stopped perhaps half a century before'.[61] Already in the 1920s, Sassoon had admitted to 'being happiest, really, with elderly people because they can talk about the past'.[62] Wilson notes that '[w]hen the poet Charles Causley wrote to tell Sassoon how much he admired his work, Sassoon replied that most people seemed to think he had died in 1919'.[63] But Sassoon had *not* died in battle. He had survived, and with him his notions of gentlemanliness, steeped in pastoralism and love of the countryside he had grown up in. He certainly felt nostalgic for old values and old lifestyles, but his nostalgia was not the simple Things-were-better-Then-than-they-are-Now-kind, of which his critics have so often accused him. By looking back to the allegedly good old days, with the historical hindsight of his war experience, Sassoon understands that his early life had not provided him with the open-mindedness to foresee the war. His nostalgia is thus questioning, reflexive and even interpretative.

Fleishman's comment that *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man* 'is the book that made [Sassoon] a venerated relic of the social world he set out to decently bury – the Cranford-Barset-"sceptered isle" world he continued to relish and recall while undertaking to show its limitations and its passing' sums up the ambiguity in Sassoon's work.[64] It portrays the survival of the gentleman in and after the trenches. The protagonist is depicted as consciously fashioning himself according to preconceived, old-fashioned notions of gentlemanliness, and although he eventually recognizes them as out of keeping with modern times, they sustain him through the horrors of the war. Sassoon's account is a very personal one, which shows how his ideas of gentlemanliness were coloured, not only by personal notions of Englishness, but also by homoeroticism and the men in his life. He had been brought up as a country gentleman, and his love for the land not only dominates his life, but also consoles him at times of despair.

60 Wilson, 'Brothers in Arms': 6.
61 Anthony Powell, *To Keep the Ball Rolling*, p. 351.
62 Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon*, p. 221.
63 Wilson, 'Brothers in Arms': 6.
64 Fleishman, *Figures of Autobiography*, p. 339.

Ultimately, Sassoon simultaneously *celebrates* and *deconstructs* the old world. His celebration of the peaceful, traditional pre-war world is problematized by his own recognition of its datedness, which comes during the war. To condemn Sassoon's novel superficially as merely a nostalgic account of how good things used to be before the war, however, is to miss the point. *Memoirs of a Foxhunting Man* is a *Bildungsroman*, in which the protagonist needs the horrors of the First World War in order to realize the limitations of his earlier existence as a country gentleman. But, at the same time, he also understands that it was his upbringing, and the memory of that earlier existence, which helps him survive the war.

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Chapter 5

Dancing to the Music of Widmerpool – The Gentleman in Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time*

The Context

Anthony Powell started writing *A Dance to the Music of Time* in the late 1940s.[1] It was a project which kept him occupied for over 25 years, taking his cast of more than 300 characters from the pre-war years to the mid 1970s, sustaining him through social, political and economic change within England and throughout the world. Before the Second World War, Powell had already made a name for himself with the publication of five light-hearted, satirical novels, reminiscent of the early social satire of Evelyn Waugh and Aldous Huxley.[2] Powell's early work can be considered modernist for his use, not only of humour and social satire which shows a dissenting view of society, but also of modernist techniques such as montage.[3] *A Dance to the Music of Time*, however, was to make a clean break with Powell's earlier work, both in tone and scope: in it, Powell attempted to provide a comprehensive social sketch of half a century of British life, beginning the narrative in 1919 and ending it in the 1970s. It is the sheer time scale of the 12-volume sequence that makes it such a pertinent social and historical document. Steven Connor writes that 'the novel has always been a useful resource for history and historians. Typically, the novel promises a view of that fine grain of events and experiences which otherwise tend to shrink to invisibility in the long perspectives of historical explanation'.[4] During

1 There is some difficulty in giving an exact starting date for the composition of *Dance*. Neither Powell's own memoirs and journals, nor the autobiography of his wife, Lady Violet Powell, shed light on a precise date. Both agree, however, that a start was made around 1948, the time of publication of Powell's post-war scholarly work on John Aubrey.

2 *Afternoon Men* (1931), *Venusberg* (1932), *From a View to a Death* (1933), *Agents and Patients* (1936) and *What's Become of Waring* (1939).

3 See Lisa Colletta, *Dark Humor and Social Satire in the Modern British Novel* (New York, 2003). At the Second Biennial Anthony Powell Conference in 2003, the writer and critic D.J. Taylor referred to Powell as a 'right-wing modernist' in the vein of T.S. Eliot. In *A Dance to the Music of Time*, there are still many nods to the literary modernism of the early twentieth century, especially in allusions to modernist works, in particular Proust and Joyce (*MP*, p. 600; *HSH*, pp. 614 – 5). Powell was particularly influenced by F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and *Dance* shows many similarities to that work, the most prominent being the similarly unobtrusive narrators Nick Jenkins and Nick Carraway.

4 Steven Connor, *The English Novel in History, 1950–1995* (London, 1996), p. 1.

the course of the narrative of *Dance*, Powell follows a group of old schoolfriends through several decades of their respective lives, charting different social terrains as well as working through key historical events, and thereby providing his readers with a social history of Britain which spans over five decades.[5]

In order to comprehend fully the historical complexity of *A Dance to the Music of Time*, knowledge of its social and historical context is important. Powell's *opus* addresses many key national and international events, starting with the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. The first six volumes of the novel are dedicated to the 1920s and 1930s, charting the social movements of the protagonist Nicholas Jenkins and his friends, all of them typical Bright Young Things whose lives are dominated by socializing, parties and dances. There are also, however, examples of the less sparkling sides of life: hints about disarmament, unemployment, hunger marches, and about the plight of artists, struggling to make a living in a world increasingly hostile towards the arts. Three out of the twelve instalments are dedicated to the Second World War, and in particular the machinations at the home front. The three final volumes are the most interesting with regard to historical development, and especially to the overall theme of this book, the gentleman. They chart the decades following the Second World War and the decisive changes in British social life, taking the reader from austerity to affluence. Developments and events, such as educational reforms, starting with the Butler Act of 1944 which resulted in the establishment of new universities across the country, the development of the Welfare State, the loss of Empire, the Vietnam War, and the arrival of new fashions and religious cults, are woven into the narrative in a detached manner. They are never clearly in the foreground, but Powell uses them to show how individual characters' lives are affected for the better or the worse. He sees the importance of being open towards new developments, and realizes that change in general is in the nature of things. But he also uses this very change to voice his own sense of social decline, displacement and moral diaspora.

It is difficult to position *A Dance to the Music of Time* in the canon of English literature. Ever since its publication, critics have been debating the novel's merits. While some have hailed Anthony Powell as 'the most elegant writer presently working in the English language', others have labelled his books 'just entertaining enough to read in bed late at night in summer'.[6] Nick Birns probably best sums up *Dance*'s merits: '[It] was never a bestseller, but it quickly developed an intense and widespread following.'[7]

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5 A closer look at Lady Violet Powell's *The Album to Anthony Powell's Dance to the Music of Time* admirably illustrates the social changes depicted by Powell. It opens with images of top-hatted Eton boys and flapper girls in the 1920s, proceeds to contemporary cartoons, depictions of anti-war demonstrations and hunger marches in the 1930s, moves to images of London during the Blitz, and ends with photos of singing hippies and dancing cult members in the 1970s.

6 Frederick R. Karl, 'Sisyphus Descending: Mythical Patterns in the Novels of Anthony Powell', *Mosaic* 4/3 (1971): 13; Edmund Wilson, quoted in Bernard Bergonzi, 'Anthony Powell: 9/12', *Critical Quarterly* 11 (1969): 78.

7 Nicholas Birns, *Understanding Anthony Powell* (Columbia, SC, 2004), p. 19.

Much of the existing criticism of *Dance* focuses on questions of time, chronology, memory and narration in the novel.[8] Most critics would agree, however, that the focus of the novel sequence is the presentation of society. In this, it follows a proud tradition. Jones argues that 'Powell had created an almost 19th-century type audience, readers who had followed the work volume by volume', and Bader states that 'Powell … provide[s] us with a picture of a closed society. This particular aspect connects [him] with the traditions of the novel in the nineteenth century, particularly with Jane Austen'.[9] Bergonzi reinforces this point: 'Powell writes, admittedly, of a fairly small world, even though it is densely populated; his vision of it is in the central tradition of English social comedy which derives from Jane Austen. He is totally intimate with this world, and yet is invariably detached enough to catch with dazzling accuracy the minutest aspect of its manners.'[10] It is this detachment which gives credence to Powell's work. He writes as a social insider to a charmed circle of society; but he does not close his eyes to its shortcomings.

This subject-matter – the close scrutiny of society, and here in particular upper-class society – also makes *Dance* such a very English novel. Added to this is the tone of the narrative: detached and calm, it quietly chronicles the demise of a social group without openly succumbing to nostalgia. And this very tone is also used subtly, to depict social differences.

Powell's work has not as yet found the widespread success that is its due. Arthur Mizener puts this down to the fact that 'Powell belongs to no easily definable party', and never sought the limelight for either himself or his work.[11] Such academic criticism of *A Dance to the Music of Time* as *exists*, is utterly divided in opinion. Rix sums this up:

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8 See for example: Laurie Adams Frost, *Reminiscent Scrutinies: Memory in Anthony Powell's 'A Dance to the Music of Time'* (Troy, NY, 1990); Donald William Bruce, 'Anthony Powell: The Reversals and Renewals of Time: Parts 1 and 2', *Contemporary Review* 256/1493 (June 1990): 309–14, and 257/1494 (July 1990): 40–4; Mark A.R. Facknitz, 'Self-Effacement as Revelation: Narration and Art in Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time*', *Journal of Modern Literature* 15/4 (Spring 1989): 519–29; Lynette Felber, 'A Text of Arrested Desire: The Anticlimax of Extended Narrative in Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time*', *Style* 22/4 (Winter 1988): 576–94; Henry R. Harrington, 'Anthony Powell, Nicolas Poussin, and the Structure of Time', *Contemporary Literature* 24/4 (1983): 431–48; Keith Wilson, 'Pattern and Process: The Narrative Strategies of Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time*', *English Studies in Canada* 11/2 (June 1985): 214–22.

9 Richard Jones, 'Anthony Powell's *Music*: Swansong of the Metropolitan Romance', *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 52/3 (Summer 1976): 353; Rudolf Bader, *Anthony Powell's 'Music of Time' as a Cyclic Novel of Generations* Schweizer Anglistische Arbeiten / Swiss Studies in English 101 (Bern, 1980), p. 167.

10 Bernard Bergonzi, *Anthony Powell* (London, 1971), p. 19. See also Jones, 'Anthony Powell's *Music*': 353–69, Rosemary M. Colt, 'Anthony Powell's Archetypal Characters', in Rosemary M. Colt and Janice Rossen (eds), *Writers of the Old School: British Novelists of the 1930s* (London, 1992), p. 57 and James Tucker, *The Novels of Anthony Powell* (London, 1976), p. 135, who all reinforce the closely-knit Austenesque social circle of Powell's work.

11 Arthur Mizener, '*A Dance to the Music of Time*: The Novels of Anthony Powell', *Kenyon Review* 22 (1960): 79.

> The novels have not only been read as a stern Tory presentation of intellectual and social life after World War I, but also as a highly philosophical treatise on human perception, as an artist's chronicle of isolation in and alienation from society, as a thinly disguised revue of prominent contemporaries, as a primarily theological dispute with the Twentieth Century and quite simply as a reactionary view of a new age of mass democracy. It is virtually impossible to play one interpretation off against another. At present all one can say is that it will be some time until response is given to Powell which will be of a more unanimous character.[12]

Rix sees Powell as a descendant of modernist writers such as Kafka, Eliot or Proust; he explains this by reference to the circular movement of Powell's novel, and to his use of mythology, both popular devices with the modernists. Schäfer aligns Powell's work to the social-critical works of the Angry Young Men; and Teachout remarks that 'in progressive-minded literary circles, one need merely assert that Anthony Powell is (1) conservative and (2) snobbish in order to establish that he is an enemy of right-thinking types everywhere,' concluding that 'yet this line of attack, banal as it is, does point toward an important truth: *A Dance to the Music of Time* is, in a special sense, a profoundly "political" novel'.[13] These statements have to be considered both in some detail and in context.

Powell's novel had reached only its third instalment, *The Acceptance World*, when, in 1955, the movement of the so-called Angry Young Men began to gather speed. Another crucial year for the movement was 1956, termed 'annus mirabilis' by Robert Hewison.[14] On the political and international front, it was the year of the Suez crisis. On the cultural front, it saw the publication of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Colin Wilson's *The Outsider*, harbingers of a new trend in literature. Other writers who were also labelled 'angry' and 'young' were Kingsley Amis, John Wain and John Braine. Although the Angry Young Men rebelled against this label, they and their work shared several characteristics. In very general terms, it can be said that the 'angry' novelists came from a different (lower) social background and, in their writing, moved away from the popular post-war country-house novel of Evelyn Waugh, Nancy Mitford, Angela Thirkell and similar writers, turning instead to the social echelons of the lower-middle classes and, predominantly, the working classes. Alan Ross explained that, in the 1940s,

> Literature took a temporary turn to the Right. The days of social realism, of proletarian art and documentary reporting were gone forever. … The moth was gingerly removed from dinner-jackets and bright, linen trousers, from espadrilles and travelling-rugs. The Marxists shut up shop. There appeared to be no minority causes left for the writer; only a retreat to private conflicts, to an imaginative romanticism that turned its back on the

12 Walter T. Rix, 'Anthony Powell, *A Dance to the Music of Time*: Circular Progression', in Hedwig Bock and Albert Wertheim (eds), *Essays on the Contemporary British Novel* (München, 1986), p. 27.

13 Jürgen Schäfer, 'Anthony Powell: Books Do Furnish a Room', in Rainer Lengeler, *Englische Literatur der Gegenwart, 1971–1975* (Düsseldorf, 1977), p. 254; Terry Teachout, 'The "Politics" of Anthony Powell', *The New Criterion* 10/9 (May 1992): 25.

14 Robert Hewison, *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War 1945–60* (London, 1981), p. 127.

> outworn political clichés of an earlier generation. The best writing was upper-middle-class and upper-middle-aged … .[15]

Hewison refers to the values of the so-called 'Authors of the Right' as 'Cultural Mandarin', a term he borrows from Cyril Connolly. He explains that 'having abandoned the mild socialism that had given Bloomsbury a radical edge up to 1945, the intellectual aristocracy fell back on a system of values that was more appropriate to … the caste from which they came. These values were truly aristocratic in origin, in that they were conservative of tradition, pastoral as opposed to industrial, and most detectable when it came to nuances of class'.[16] Intriguingly, this *literary* turn to the Right in the 1940s happened in parallel with the *political* turn to the Left of Labour's surprise election victory in 1945. Literature, with country-house settings and depictions of a world unaffected by war, served as escapism in a time of austerity.[17] However, by the time the Angry Young Men were vying for attention, austerity had made way for a modest affluence, and the 'Angries' wanted to make a case for the less privileged.

The Angry Young Men also tried to establish a particular form of masculinity, far removed from effeminacy. Alistair Davis and Peter Saunders explain that they celebrated 'masculine vigour and [showed their] contempt for physical and moral weakness'.[18] In so doing, they revolted against a commonly held and *accepted* view which associated art with female values – one has only to think of Forster's *Howards End*, where the female Schlegels represent the arts and intellectual pursuits, whereas the masculine Wilcoxes are the powerful Empire builders. The 'Angries' ridiculed this notion with clichéd representations of effeminate artists and intellectuals; the character of Bertrand Welch in Amis's *Lucky Jim* comes to mind. With this attitude, the Angry Young Men directly attacked an earlier generation of writers and thinkers, trying to undermine their work and lifestyle.

This openly homophobic attitude of the Angry Young Men was increasingly reflected in the attitude of the general public. Although the 1950s and 1960s saw a general movement towards sexual liberation, the trend was in the opposite direction as far as homoeroticism and homosexuality were concerned. Jonathan Dollimore explains that 'between 1939 and 1953 prosecution for … male homosexual offences rose quite dramatically (… fivefold), even though there was little evidence to show

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15 Alan Ross, *The Forties* (London, 1950), quoted in Hewison, *In Anger*, p. 5.

16 Hewison, *In Anger*, p. 64.

17 There is also evidence for that in the growing demand for novels in the immediate post-war years. Stuart Laing expands on the decline in new publications between 1939 and 1945, caused mainly by paper rationing, which was, however, met by an increasing demand for new material. Once paper rationing was abolished in 1948, the publishing industry experienced an unprecedented boom. The year 1949 saw the publication of 17,034 new titles (2,000 more than in the last pre-war year). See Stuart Laing, 'The Production of Literature', in Alan Sinfield (ed.), *Society & Literature 1945–1970* (London, 1983), p. 123.

18 Alistair Davies and Peter Saunders, 'Literature, Politics and Society', in Sinfield (ed.), *Society & Literature 1945–1970*, p. 26.

any increase in the actual number of offences'.[19] The Wolfenden Committee, which investigated homosexuality during the 1950s, actually suggested some progressive changes to laws concerning homosexuality, but they were not taken up until a decade later.

The writing of the Angry Young Men celebrated the 'go-getting' attitude of vigorous, self-made men struggling against the obstacles life throws in their way. Hewison defines the typical Angry Young Man thus: 'The "University Wits" provided him with an education, courtesy of the 1944 Education Act; his working-class or lower middle-class origins gave him a view of the world which made him resentful of those who continued to enjoy the privileges from which he felt excluded. The political and literary values of the older generation of intellectuals offered him little except targets for his criticism, to the extent that "intellectual" was liable to be used as a term of abuse.'[20] In view of this, Powell clearly cannot be considered an Angry Young Man. In fact, he stood for everything that the 'Angries' reacted against: a privileged background, and an upper-middle-class setting for his novels. However, the fact cannot be disregarded that, in *A Dance to the Music of Time*, he *creates* an interesting version of at least *one* angry man in the figure of Widmerpool.

Dance can also be read as a political novel for various reasons. At a superficial reading, it could be argued that it is a manifestation of its politically conservative author's lament at changing times. Its very setting in an upper-class milieu makes it political, at least for those critics who see Powell merely as a conservative writer with reactionary views. The very mention of country houses in his novels makes him suspect. Lynette Felber explains that 'the trope that Powell uses … derives from the country-house genre. … Powell's use of such a time-honored and "hierarchical" trope thus doubly indicates his conservatism,' and surmises that his 'presentation of the country estate and the upper classes as artefacts and victims of social devolution … suggests a backward-looking movement, historically and narratively, which is characteristic of a conservative ideology'.[21] This seems short-sighted. Powell – like Jane Austen before him – wrote about the environment he knew best. As early as 1947, he explained that 'novels that deal with a specialized form of life inevitably pose the question of how successfully or otherwise their author has presented the background against which the characters play their part'.[22] The United States Congressman John Monagan recalls that 'Tony complained that some reviewers maintained that all he wrote about were the upper classes. He pointed out that this was wrong, citing the troops in the military and the actors, musicians and bohemians as contrary examples. But, he asked if he should be required to write from the point of view of a surgeon or some unfamiliar person'.[23] Powell's depiction of historical

19 Jonathan Dollimore, 'The Challenge of Sexuality', in Sinfield (ed.), *Society & Literature 1945—1970*, p. 61.

20 Hewison, *In Anger*, p. 141.

21 Lynette Felber, 'The Politics of Neutrality: Presentation and Ideology in *A Dance to the Music of Time*', *Mosaic* 25/3 (Summer 1992): 66–7; 71.

22 Anthony Powell (ed.), *Novels of High Society from the Victorian Age* (London, 1947), p. xiii.

23 John Monagan, *The Master and the Congressman* (Greenford, 2003), p. 16. Further in his defence, Powell also mentioned the fact that *At Lady Molly's*, the volume most concerned

events, and his openness to the description of new fashions and trends, show clearly that he was not stuck in a nostalgic time-warp, nor that he restricted himself in his choice of settings for his novels.

However, *A Dance to the Music of Time* is political for another reason. Through the figure of Widmerpool, Powell not only charts the career of a power-obsessed individual but also shows up the absurdities of power and politics. In fact, power is one of his main themes in the novel: how people strive for it, and, once they have attained it, how they cope with it. The war trilogy, depicting the intrigue in war-time Whitehall, serves as a particularly good example. Through Widmerpool's rise to political notoriety, *Dance* becomes a political novel in the true sense.

A Dance to the Music of Widmerpool

A Dance to the Music of Time is a fascinating novel as far as the idea of the gentleman is concerned. The following discussion will focus on two of the novel's many characters: *Dance*'s narrator, Nicholas Jenkins, and its antagonist Kenneth Widmerpool – the only two characters to appear in all twelve volumes. Those two characters are of particular importance because they represent opposing ideas. Nick is a reliable character throughout the narrative. Very much drawn from the author's own life, he represents the artist: as a writer, he enjoys observing people and sharing his ideas about them. He also stands for a more traditional way of life. Widmerpool, on the other hand, is a philistine: he is not interested in arts or culture; what he craves is power. The novel charts his career from son of a business man, successful City man, Colonel in the army, MP in Atlee's post-war Labour government, Life Peer, University Chancellor, to his eventual demise as a spiritual crank. He functions as the *New Man* of the twentieth century, the man of action as opposed to the man of letters.

Throughout the novel, Nick is depicted as a static character: he is comfortable with his role and place in society; he knows who he is and what his position in life is. Born of a family of upper-middle class gentlemen, he is content to live his life in the same vein; happy to chronicle what is happening around him, without feeling the urge to change his life according to new trends and fashions. Widmerpool, on the other hand, is shown as a rootless but dynamic character. Insecure in his lower social position as offspring of a manufacturer of liquid manure, he spends his life chasing trend after trend to attain position and power, forever discontent with what he has achieved. Powell uses the gentleman as a literary trope, to give voice to his own conception of and evaluation of society: Nick represents what Powell himself stood for, Widmerpool what he had over the years come to consider inevitable. The case of Widmerpool, however, also draws attention to some ambiguity in the author himself, which problematizes his conception of gentlemanliness.

Throughout the narrative, there are many social points which can be *deduced* and which might counter Powell's views and intentions. There are several instances

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with high society, outsold the other instalments because 'people liked to read about society, even though they said they did not' (Monagan, *The Master and the Congressman*, p. 16).

where the attitude of Nick especially towards Widmerpool *could* be interpreted in a way that would play into the hands of those critics who see *Dance* as merely a piece of nostalgic and reactionary writing. However, these instances will have to be questioned, bearing in mind the possible intentions of the author.

The novel sequence starts with an aged Nick Jenkins looking back over his life. The starting point for his reminiscences is a typical English public school, never named, but recognizably Eton. The first few paragraphs of the narrative set the tone for the remaining volumes; they acquaint the reader with some of its main characters – the narrator Nicholas Jenkins; his schoolfriends Peter Templer and Charles Stringham; and the rather odd-pupil-out Kenneth Widmerpool. G.S. Fraser explains:

> The three schoolboys … stand for three broad divisions in the English upper middle classes. The narrator represents in a sense the norm, the type of the professional classes. … A wealthier but flashier young friend [Templer], who does not dream of going to a university, is the predestined stockbroker. Another friend, Stringham, reckless and charmingly ruthless … who goes to a university but does not bother to work, represents old-fashioned aristocratic dash … . A dull and awkward boy, Widmerpool, the butt of all the others at school, humourless and self-important, plods on … to greater power and influence in the world, while remaining intrinsically absurd, as Stringham remains intrinsically attractive.[24]

Those first few pages establish reader expectations, and we unquestioningly take over the values attached to them. Widmerpool will remain the odd one out; Stringham we expect to reach the pinnacle of social acclaim; Templer to be always good for an anecdote or two about women and sex. What we as readers are not prepared for, however, is that things will not necessarily turn out that way.

Nick Jenkins is a man of letters; his life is one of gentlemanly and literary pursuits – characteristics he shares with his creator.[25] His education at public school and Oxford reflects his upper-middle-class background. Nick always follows his inclinations, and, although he always works, he does not seem to have to – we never read of Nick having to miss a party because he has to be at his desk early in the morning. We never hear of his being hard-pressed financially. And the fact that he is so easily accepted by his aristocratic wife's family is itself telling for his social background. He is not ambitious. He has enough leisure to begin writing novels, and he can continue writing them without being too concerned about their sales or critical acclaim. His life is governed by socializing: meeting friends, going out to the pictures, to society dances, for meals or for drinks. In short, his is not an existence dominated by a nine-to-five working day, but the life of a gentleman of literary inclination, who is fortunate enough to be able to make what little he needs to supplement his income by the pen. Powell's subtlety is visible here: Nick never

24 G.S. Fraser, *The Modern Writer and His World* (London, 1964), p. 155.

25 Both are sons of army men, educated at Eton and Oxford; active as screenwriters, publishers and novelists; both are married to daughters of old aristocratic families, have two sons, and serve in the Welch Guards during the war. For information on Powell's life, see Michael Barber, *Anthony Powell: A Life* (London, 2004).

brags about the fact that he does not have to worry about his finances; but neither does the reader see him squandering money. In fact, money is simply not mentioned. This distinguishes Nick's behaviour from that of many of his acquaintances, for example Templer, who is a stockbroker and enjoys being paid to talk money. Jones explains that 'Nicholas Jenkins is a gentleman of the old school. … What sets Jenkins apart from most characters in modern fiction is his social composure. He knows exactly who he is and what he can expect of himself'.[26] Nick is too well-rooted in his gentlemanly background to be disturbed by new developments. The security of his own social standing helps him keep his composure in all situations, and enables him to chronicle events calmly.

But it is precisely this self-control in Nick that many critics complain about: Tucker calls him 'bland and amorphous', 'lethargic and null' and a 'wallflower'; Frost claims that his 'sin is sloth'; others see him as lacking in willpower and 'shadowy'.[27] These critics do not see that Nick follows an old gentlemanly code: do not talk about yourself; do not put yourself forward at all occasions; be friendly and helpful – but do that from the background, in the role of the quiet observer who absorbs information, rather than gives it away. Gransden sums this up with 'better to be a gentleman, even if a comparatively ineffectual one … than a successful cad or hack'.[28] Nick understands that a struggle for fame and power might come at the cost of losing some of his gentlemanly reticence; in his schoolfellow Widmerpool, he sees how the use of elbows to obtain power compromises not only a person's manners but also one's sense of self.

With this attitude, Nick goes against nineteenth-century trends which saw the middle-class gentleman strive for political and social prominence. He is a representative of Carlyle's 'Man of Letters', a man who lives by the power of his thought and, crucially, his imagination.[29] Carving out a niche for himself in life does not mean obtaining riches and power. For Nick, it means obtaining peace of mind to follow his creative ambitions.

Tucker throws another expression into the equation. He claims that 'of a recognizable upper-class English type, [Jenkins] is endowed with considerable self-control and calmness and a notable taste for understatement. I say English. This restraint … does have its counterparts elsewhere. An Italian word – *sprezzatura*

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26 Jones, 'Anthony Powell's *Music*': 354–5.

27 Tucker, *The Novels of Anthony Powell*, pp. 105, 108, 129; Frost, *Reminiscent Scrutinies*, p. 68 (incidentally, Nick even impersonates Sloth in Magnus Donner's photographic session of the seven cardinal sins, see *KO*, p. 601); see, for example, Frederick R. Karl, *A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel* revised edition (London, 1972), p. 243; John Rees Moore, 'Anthony Powell's England: *A Dance to the Music of Time*', *The Hollins Critic* 8/4 (October 1971): 4.

28 K.W. Gransden, 'Taste of the Old Time', *Encounter* (December 1966): 107.

29 In his 'The Hero as Man of Letters' Carlyle had celebrated the power of thought and imagination: '…is it not, verily, at bottom, the highest act of man's faculty that produces a Book? It is the *Thought* of man; the true thaumaturgic virtue; … The thing we called "bits of paper with traces of black ink," is the *purest* embodiment a Thought of man can have' (Thomas Carlyle, 'The Hero as Man of Letters' in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* [London, 1869], p. 195).

– best sums up Nicholas's qualities'.[30] With this, the qualities of the twentieth-century English gentleman, as represented in Nick, go back full circle to those of the courtier, and we can link Nick to literary predecessors such as Spenser's Sir Guyol, the Knight Temperance, and Sir Calidore, who represents courtesy. Whatever Nick does, he does it without apparent effort, but instead with an innate ease and grace. The word 'innate' is important: Nick's attitude is natural; and this is the main difference between him and Widmerpool, who resembles Spenser's aptly named Braggadochio.

As a narrator, Nick is equally detached; he observes and compares. Martin describes his style as 'never crabbed, stilted, self-conscious or precious; it has formal measure and balance, together with the ease and grace of good conversation, because it issues from an integrated personality and a cultivated mind.'[31] There is no over-excitement in his narrative; it is cool and collected. His very objectivity, his seeming 'uninvolvedness', distinguishes him. Colt claims that 'his quiet, sensitive manner earns our trust immediately'.[32] Although Nick does not give away much about his personal life – his marriage to Isobel, for example, remains largely in the dark – he appears to have nothing to hide.[33]

In *The Acceptance World*, Nick has his fortune told by clairvoyant Myra Erdleigh. She analyses him in an astonishing way: '"You live between two worlds … perhaps even more than two worlds"' (*AW*, p. 526). This brings us back again to the notion of the gentleman being trapped between two worlds. It is easy to see which two worlds Nick inhabits. Physically, he lives in the modern world, going through all the changes that five decades bring with them; psychologically, he is caught in another, much older world – that of chivalry and good behaviour, crumbling before his very eyes. Nevertheless, Nick admits that 'I was firmly of the opinion that even the smallest trace of nostalgia for the immediate past was better avoided. A bracing future was required, rather than vain regrets' (*LM*, p. 15). Regrets there *may* be but Nick is determined to see life go on. There are two basic approaches to life: to look either back in anger, or ahead in enjoyment and hope. Nick follows the latter course, and one can conclude that this was also Powell's attitude.

Kenneth Widmerpool is a different kettle of fish. Marked at school as the strange boy in the wrong overcoat, he is regarded as an oddity. Nick eventually realizes that Widmerpool is more than that – careerist, rather than figure of fun, a power-

30 Tucker, *The Novels of Anthony Powell*, p. 108.

31 W.R. Martin, 'Style as an Achievement in Anthony Powell's *The Music of Time*', *English Studies in Africa* 14 (1971): 85.

32 Colt, 'Archetypal Characters', p. 57.

33 The critic Humphrey Carpenter argues that 'the suspicion arises that Powell chose to narrate in the first person, in an expansive and reflective manner, because Waugh had done so in *Brideshead Revisited* with considerable popular success' (Humphrey Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation: Evelyn Waugh and His Friends* [London, 1989], p. 417). This suspicion seems rather far-fetched. Despite several similarities between *Brideshead* and *Dance*, one should doubt whether Powell chose a first-person narrator merely to cash in on Waugh's success. If a literary parallel must be found, it is much more likely to be Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* which Powell admired greatly.

addict who likes manipulating people – but the image of the odd schoolboy proves too strong to shake off entirely, and the brief spells of admiration he feels for, say, Widmerpool's efficiency, are always counterbalanced by recollections of the odd boy he used to be.

Where Widmerpool is concerned, there is an increased emphasis on clothes across all 12 volumes of the novel. Clothes and changing fashions play a vital part in Powell's depiction of Widmerpool as the odd one out. Hand in hand with them comes, again, the idea of literal self-fashioning: we see Widmerpool attempting to dress and look like a typical public-schoolboy; a man of the world; a soldier; a Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General; a Life Peer; a left-wing intellectual agitator; and a cult member.[34] The word *attempting* is an important distinction because, lacking an innate fashion sense, Widmerpool is depicted as forever wearing either the wrong apparel, or attire too small for him. If we take into account that dress can function as an observable marker of class, then this immediately marginalizes him. On a different level, it also shows him to be uncomfortable in his adopted outer skin. With his choice of clothing, Widmerpool attempts to fit into whatever social sphere he aspires to at the moment. But usually the result is the opposite: it emphasizes his discomfort, and highlights the fact of his not belonging. Widmerpool can thus be seen as the antithesis of a clearly recognizable gentlemanly style.

This idea of 'self-fashioning' in Widmerpool is strengthened by his continual change of language or tone of voice, depending on what role he assumes. This is particularly noticeable during his army career, when Nick cannot help but think that Widmerpool is play-acting. He points out that Widmerpool regularly assumes 'a manner of hearty military geniality' (*SA*, p. 270). This comes hand in hand with a change of speech: '"Come and see me by all means, my boy," he *boomed* down the wire in a *new*, enormously *hearty voice*, "but bring your own beer. There won't be much I can do for you. I'm up to my arse in bumph and don't expect I shall be able to spare you more than a minute or two for waffling"' (*KO*, p. 693, emphases mine); 'The voice, like so many other dictating or admonitory voices of even that early period of the war, had assumed the timbre and inflexions of the Churchill broadcast, slurred consonants, rhythmical stresses and prolations' (*TVB*, p. 239). Widmerpool adheres to a publicly recognized manner of speech, as if imitating the leaders can guarantee himself more influence. Again, these examples are proof of Widmerpool's innate insecurities: he changes his looks and his attitude with every new position, in order to try and fit in better.

Widmerpool's ever-changing professional jargon highlights the importance of the way Powell uses language to demonstrate differences between his characters. And it is not only language, it is the *tone* in which things are said. Nick's manner of speech, for example, does not change throughout the novel; this emphasizes his steadfast character. Widmerpool's speech changes, drastically and often. In several instances, this leads to amusing scenes when one cannot but chuckle at the pomposity of Widmerpool's speech. Powell's aim was to highlight the different attitudes of the two men. The fact that often Nick can make neither head nor tail of Widmerpool's

34 See, for example, *QU*, p. 3; *AW*, p. 689; *KO*, p. 609; *TVB*, p. 240; *TK*, p. 350; *HSH*, pp. 633 and 741–3.

language shows that they are on different levels. They simply do not speak the same language – and that is also an important contributory factor to their individual conceptions of gentlemanliness.

As readers, we first meet Widmerpool emerging from the mist, coming back from a lonely run at school: 'Widmerpool, in a sweater once white and cap at least a size too small, hobbling unevenly, though with determination, on the flat heels of spiked running shoes' (*QU*, p. 3). Obviously, Widmerpool dons these clothes to fit the expected image of the sporting public-schoolboy. His family background – *t* for *trade* rather than *title* – sets him apart from his more privileged schoolfellows and makes him strive even harder for this perfect image. But he achieves only awkwardness: a discoloured, if not dirty sweater; a cap too small; 'hobbling,' instead of the assured strides of proper athletes. However, the word *determination* stands out, and is trailblazing for the future. As a boy, Widmerpool already shows astonishing single-mindedness in advancing his interests. Nick describes Widmerpool's time at school as being dominated by dogged attempts to improve his physical shape by training for whichever sport is in season, in order to fit into the acknowledged mould of the public-schoolboy. This determination to train, even though he knows he will never be good enough, shows two different traits of the Widmerpudlian character. On the one hand, it highlights his willpower: no obstacle is too high; but, on the other hand, it shows his desire to please, the wish to blend in, which, despite all his oddities and disregard of other people's opinions, dominates his life.

The notorious 'wrong overcoat' is only the first and most famous in a series of fashion disasters which mark Widmerpool as not quite the 'real thing'. At a prestigious public school, the dress code is strictly prescribed, not only to provide the boys with a sense of uniformity, but also to dress them in the proper attire in preparation for their future lives as gentlemen. Widmerpool, by wearing the wrong overcoat, signals immediately that he is not one of the chosen ones; that he stands out from a uniform crowd. Concerning the overcoat, Nick reports that Widmerpool 'would have remained a dim outline to me if he had not at an earlier date … made himself already memorable, as a new boy, by wearing the wrong kind of overcoat. … This overcoat gave Widmerpool a lasting notoriety which his otherwise unscintillating career at school could never wholly dispel' (*QU*, pp. 5–6). Interestingly, though, Nick never specifies what exactly *was* wrong with Widmerpool's overcoat: the cut? The colour? The wrong tailor? Or was the choice of it just accidental, showing the ignorance of a socially inferior schoolboy who does not understand the rules of the élite institution? That seems to be the conclusion drawn by the other boys by virtue of their own effortless superiority. Powell's main aim, in depicting Widmerpool in his 'wrong' overcoat, was to label him as different from the start. He might have been influenced by his own time at Eton, where his friend Henry Yorke (the writer Henry Green) deliberately wore a coat which was too long, as an act of rebellion against Eton and its rules.[35] Wearing the wrong kind of overcoat sets Widmerpool apart, and he remains apart for the remainder of the narrative.

35 See Michael Barber, 'A Hero of Our Times: A Meditation on Widmerpool', in George Lilley and Keith Marshall (eds), *Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of* A Dance to the Music of

Of their time at school, Nick states that 'Widmerpool's name continued to appear in the house-list of the following September: a final assertion of the will to remain and strive further for unattainable laurels' (*QU*, p. 51). This almost masochistic streak can be seen in other instances: Widmerpool does not seem to mind being the laughing-stock, or quite literally the target of other people's amusement. During the course of the novel, he is hit in the face with a banana, has sugar poured over his head, is smacked on the chin with a peach, is beaten up by an American film-producer, and is the target of a paint and stink-bomb attack by militant students, not to mention the disdain he suffers at the hands of his wife, or the humiliation he undergoes in the sect of Scorpio Murtlock. He reacts to each and every one of these instances, if not with nonchalance, then at least without the expected outrage.

Another aspect of Widmerpool's slavish attitude can be linked to homoeroticism. In several instances, Widmerpool grovels before other men, the Captain of the Eleven, for example, or Scorpio Murtlock.[36] Throughout the novel, rumours abound concerning Widmerpool's alleged sexual ambiguity, ranging from his being impotent, through playing Peeping Tom to his wife and her lovers, to being homosexual. All this gossip helps to show that Widmerpool does not fit into conventional society; whether it is his clothes or his sexual preferences, he is always depicted as not belonging.

Widmerpool is a troubled character, craving approval, but at the same time pretending not to care about it, an attitude he preserves throughout his life. Nick, by comparison, secure in his social standing, does not worry unduly about what other people think of him; Widmerpool, however, does so constantly. This persistence in pleasing and in ingratiating himself – Nick calls it 'grovelling before someone he admired' (*BM*, p. 306) – is a clear sign of a lack of self-esteem.

While they are both staying with a French family at La Grenadière, Nick realizes that there is more to Widmerpool than just being an odd boy in a strange overcoat. Their sojourn in France is of symbolic importance for both of them, because they are confronted with their individual futures and their respective chances at success. What is of particular interest as far as the question of gentlemanliness is concerned, is their rather different approaches to tackling problems.

Time*: Proceedings of the First Biennial Anthony Powell Conference 2001* (Greenford, 2001), p. 30.

36 When the apologetic Captain of the Eleven tries to make amends for hitting Widmerpool in the face with a ripe banana, Widmerpool's reaction astonishes his schoolfellows: 'an absolutely *slavish* look came into Widmerpool's face. "I don't mind," he said, "I don't mind at all, Budd. It doesn't matter in the least"' (*QU*, pp. 10–1). This could clearly be interpreted as an attempt to please another, much admired, schoolboy. In the same instance, it is noteworthy that Widmerpool intercepts a romantic letter from another boy addressed to Peter Templer, which leads to the expulsion of the unfortunate writer of the epistle, Ackworth. Rumours later suggest that Widmerpool had acted not out of spite, but envy (see for example *HSH*, p. 718). Widmerpool's relationship with the cult leader Scorpio Murtlock is also characterised by homoerotic hero worship on Widmerpool's part. Again, rumours abound as to Widmerpool's possibly sexually motivated infatuation with Scorp (see, for example, *HSH*, pp. 790–1).

Initially, Nick is surprised to find that Widmerpool appears a respected figure in the French household. This is one of the few instances when what Colt has termed Nick's stubborn refusal 'to adjust his set idea of a character' comes to the fore.[37] For the Leroys, Widmerpool is just another paying guest, and, as such, on the same level as Nick. Nobody at La Grenadière knows that Widmerpool is prone to embarrassing himself; and even if they did, it would probably be of no consequence in their relaxed *ménage* of family, distant relatives and paying guests. For Nick, the impression of oddness gained at school clings to Widmerpool like 'a kind of exotic drabness … that seemed to mark him out from the rest of mankind' (*QU*, p. 118). Widmerpool himself has far fewer problems in adjusting to the new situation.

Nevertheless, their stay at La Grenadière shows up some latent class consciousness in both of them: in Nick, it takes the form of what *could* be construed as snobbishness, in Widmerpool of something possibly more far-sighted, although it might initially be taken for envy. When discussing their time at school and their upper-class schoolfellow Stringham, Widmerpool surprises Nick with the claim that he was too senior at school to have been a friend of Stringham's. For Nick, this is a serious imposition. He ponders: 'For Widmerpool to imply that it was merely a matter of age that had prevented him from being on easy terms with Stringham struck me … as showing quite unjustifiable complacency regarding *his own place in life*' (*QU*, pp. 128–9; emphasis mine). From this it could be inferred that Nick ranks the upper-class Stringham, whom he himself admires, in a higher social position than a schoolfellow whose family deals in manure. But this incident can also be judged without bringing the boys' social background into the equation: Stringham was popular at school, Widmerpool was not, and Nick might be excused for accusing Widmerpool of those assumptions. Nevertheless, one cannot help but feel that class does play a part. Nick knows his own place on the social scale, and in this circumstance he also allots a place to Widmerpool. Widmerpool, on the other hand, is class-conscious in a different way. He does not approve of Stringham's behaviour at school, and equally blames it on social background: 'Stringham was thoroughly undisciplined. It came from having too much money' (*QU*, p. 130). An interesting difference between the two young men is highlighted here. Nick divides his schoolfellows into his own social superiors and inferiors; Widmerpool, whose interest in people is only to determine their usefulness for his own career, merely looks at their finances. On one level, one might interpret his attitude as envy. On another level, one might read his statement as a condemnation of the class system. He is aware that upper-class boys such as Stringham have privileges which make their lives easier. He understands that Stringham will always be considered a gentleman simply because of his class background, whereas Widmerpool himself will have to prove his worth over a quite literal stench of manure. This realization fuels his later campaign against class.

This is one possible analysis of the relationship between Nick and Widmerpool, and a Marxist reading of the novel would certainly unearth more instances of alleged class snobbery. Nevertheless, this point should not be overstressed. Rather, we should query the author's intentions: Powell is preoccupied with questions of power and human conflict rather than class war. There *is* a conflict between Nick and

37 Colt, 'Archetypal Characters', p. 58.

Widmerpool: it is the meeting of two totally different characters, one representing imagination, the other sheer willpower. What seems to have been at the forefront of Powell's mind was to highlight the difference in *tone* of the individual characters, the slight but significant nuances in their use of language.

When Nick and Widmerpool discuss their respective futures, their different social positions and their outlook on life in general are reflected. Nick – who is very relaxed about his own future – is amazed when Widmerpool reveals that he will have to give up university for financial reasons to start work as an articled solicitor after his stay in France. The following dialogues between the two are indicative of each man's attitude: '"I do not necessarily propose to remain a solicitor all my life," said Widmerpool. "I look to wider horizons." "What sort?" "Business. Politics." This all seemed to me such rubbish that I changed the subject …' (*QU*, p. 133). Again, we might condemn Nick for simply dismissing Widmerpool's ambition as 'rubbish', and claim that this once more shows his snobbishness. But his alleged snobbishness is rather more a natural recoil against Widmerpool's crass self-assertiveness. We have to look closely at Widmerpool's language and should not forget to take the speakers' ages into account. They have only just left school, and are consequently 19 years old at most. Widmerpool's 'I look to wider horizons' sounds preposterous coming from a teenager, and might be the main cause for Nick's reaction to it as 'rubbish'. Widmerpool, on the other hand, is surprised at Nick's lack of ambition:

> "What profession are you going to follow?" "I don't know." … He was almost as shocked at hearing that I had no ready-made plans for a career. … "But surely you have some bent? … An ambition to do well at something?" … I made several rather lame remarks to the effect that I wanted one day "to write:" an assertion that had not even the merit of being true, as it was an idea that had scarcely crossed my mind until that moment. "To write?" said Widmerpool. "But that is hardly a profession. Unless you want to be a journalist. …" "I suppose I might do that." "It is precarious," said Widmerpool. "And … there is certainly not much social position attached. … I should think it over very carefully. …" (*QU*, pp. 133–4).

Widmerpool's tone and use of language stand out. He is patronizing, bordering on the offensive, and again we have to consider his age: he and Nick are contemporaries, but in conversations Widmerpool always sounds like a condescending older relative speaking to a backward junior.

This conversation is repeated several years later, when a by now successful Widmerpool inquires as to Nick's professional whereabouts:

> He made some formal enquiries about the firm, and seemed rather disapproving of the nature of the business. "Who exactly buys 'art books'? … It doesn't sound to me a very serious job. … I can't see it leading to much." "What ought it to lead to?" "You should look for something more promising. From what you say, you do not even seem to keep very regular hours." "That's its great advantage." Widmerpool shook his head. (*BM*, pp. 312–3)

Widmerpool's 'who exactly buys "art books?"' shows his incredulity at there being a market for such things. 'It doesn't sound to me a very serious job' highlights his belief that only a City job – whether as lawyer or as broker – can be considered a real

job. While Nick enjoys a relatively unstructured existence, which allows him free time to attend society events, and does not plan his future, Widmerpool considers nothing else. For Nick, Widmerpool will always be the power-crazed workaholic; for Widmerpool, Nick will evermore remain an unambitious 'drifter with the stream' (*CCR*, p. 437). As such, they are representatives of their individual social and political outlooks: Widmerpool is a man of the present – ambitious, hungry for power, ruthless; Nick is a gentleman of the old school, concerned with the beautiful things in life rather than the rat race of everyday power struggles.

The two young men's different approaches to life become apparent when they have to tackle problems. In Nick's case, the problem is presented in a humorous interlude – which, however, does not hide the fact that his attitude might become a serious impediment. Contact with Widmerpool at La Grenadière has convinced Nick to become more assertive, and he decides to declare his feelings for Suzette, another visitor at the Leroys.[38] Approaching a female figure he mistakes for her in the garden, he is just about to declare his feelings when he realizes that the hand he is holding belongs to Madame Dubuisson, another house guest. Nick's reaction is indicative of his attitude towards life: he is too much of a gentleman to shake off the hand, to laugh and admit his mistake. He explains that 'it was now too late to retreat. I had prepared a few sentences to express my feelings, and I was already halfway through one of them. Having made the mistake, there was nothing for it but to behave as if it were indeed Madame Dubuisson who had made my visit to La Grenadière seem so romantic' (*QU*, pp. 164–5). This incidence highlights Nick's chivalric notions. Rather than hurt a woman by retrenching on a declaration, he pretends to something he does not feel. But this incident also puts into question the particular gentlemanliness Nick has adopted. It might be praiseworthy to follow a course, once embarked upon, regardless of surprises. But at the same time, he could be criticized for on the one hand making advances to another man's wife, and on the other pretending to feelings he does not have. Nick's false declaration to Madame Dubuisson could be used to demonstrate the shortcomings of a gentlemanly ideal which puts a stiff upper lip first, and does not allow the admission of mistakes.

Widmerpool, by comparison, is more adept at tackling problems. When two Scandinavian house guests fall out over a game of tennis, Widmerpool resolves the difficulties by addressing each of the two men individually while the rest of the household merely indulges in futile speculation about the cause of the argument. This shows a practical, and, above all, diplomatic side to Widmerpool, which Nick does not possess. His gentlemanly reticence does not let him get involved in somebody else's quarrels. Widmerpool has no such qualms.

It is Widmerpool who seems to have a firmer – albeit not necessarily more pleasant – grasp of human character, and he uses it to teach Nick some home truths: '"First … you are a great deal too fond of criticising other people: secondly, when a man's self-esteem has been injured he is to be commiserated with – not blamed. You will find it a help in life to remember those two points"' (*QU*, p. 154). This outlines

38 See *QU*, p. 162 where he confides that he became 'increasingly conscious … of the necessity to adopt an attitude towards life, in a general way, more enterprising'.

Widmerpool's strategy for the future: flatter, don't blame; praise, don't criticize. Whether or not this is a laudable tactic, it certainly takes him far.

It is during the war that Widmerpool is able to shake off fully the shackles of social restraint which have so far kept him back. His outlook on class is difficult to interpret: he is obviously an Old Boy himself, and that status comes with privileges. Nevertheless, he seems to align himself with the lower classes. The Second World War was generally referred to as the People's War, where merit counted before class.[39] Many upper-middle-class writers lamented this fact in their fiction: Evelyn Waugh, with his scornful presentation of the Age of Hoopers, will be expanded on later, but another case in point is Angela Thirkell, whose first post-war novel bears the telling title *Peace Breaks Out*. In it she laments the social changes – in her opinion for the worse – brought about by the war, among them the electoral defeat of the local Conservative by the Socialist candidate. In *Dance*, the beginning of a new era is announced during a jolly evening at Stourwater Castle: 'The door of the dining room … opened again. A man stood on the threshold. He was in uniform. He appeared to be standing to attention, a sinister, threatening figure, calling the world to arms. It was Widmerpool' (*KO*, p. 607). Nick's observation reiterates Waugh's comment about 'the Modern Age in arms' (*MAA*, p. 12). Both writers mean the same thing: the war rings in a new era that sees the ultimate rise to power of social upstarts who use the war for their self-aggrandizement. For Powell, this is presented by the meteoric rise of Widmerpool, who threatens the leisurely lifestyle of Nick and his circle. The sight of Widmerpool in uniform is consequently ominous. It leads to a total reversal of their roles. For the first time it is Nick who needs Widmerpool's help to gain a foothold in the army.[40] Typically, Widmerpool has organized himself long before Nick begins to consider his options, and Nick eventually has to fall back on using the oldest means of advancement that his class knows and has used for generations: connections and the old boys network. The war brings not only the most drastic changes to Nick's lifestyle, but also the realization that his old life will be gone for good once the war is over. The most drastic upset of his pre-war values occurs when he finds himself appointed Widmerpool's assistant. For Widmerpool, being Nick's superior is a major social success which he undoubtedly relishes. Nick's initial joy at seeing a familiar face soon gives way to a feeling of disquiet. He understands quickly that, with Widmerpool, the old boys network does not work; the fact that they are old acquaintances may have aided his selection as assistant, but he is now

39 Alan Munton explains that the term 'became current with the publication of Angus Calder's *The People's War: Britain 1939–1945* in 1969. Describing the effect of the war on civilian life, Calder argues that the social structure of Britain was altered by the mobilization of resources needed to fight a war. During 1940–1 there existed amongst a significant proportion of the British people a dissatisfaction with the way the war was being run so deep as to generate political attitudes which were … revolutionary. … Two related questions were involved: the immediate question of the conduct of the war, and long-term considerations of the kind of society that should exist in Britain after it was won. There was a widespread belief that those who had fought … the war should benefit when it was over' (Alan Munton, *English Fiction of the Second World War* [London, 1989], p. 6).

40 See *KO*, p. 692: 'Then the answer came to me. I must get in touch with Widmerpool.'

in the job solely 'subject to … giving satisfaction' (*TVB*, p. 241). Widmerpool is used to fighting for success by working harder than the competition. He explains to Nick: '"Your master is always the first staff officer to arrive at these Headquarters in the morning, and, apart from those on night duty, the last to leave after the sun has gone down"' (*SA*, p. 270). Widmerpool's use of the word 'master' shows that he overestimates their working relationship. His tone resembles that of a book of regulations, endlessly citing rules.

Nick is unused to the idea of a meritocracy. If one recalls his previously expressed attitude about Widmerpool's 'place in life' (*QU*, pp. 128–9), then the fact of having now to take orders from him must come as a cosmic upheaval. Indicative of this is the quotation 'I was now in Widmerpool's power. This, for some reason, gave me a disagreeable, sinking feeling within. On the news that night, motorized elements of the German army were reported as occupying the outskirts of Paris' (*TVB*, p. 243). The invasion of Paris by the Nazis functions as a metaphor for the invasion of the sphere of upper-class privilege by the unpleasant Widmerpool. Both the invasion of Paris and the infiltration of upper-class rights represent the violation of an established order.

While under Widmerpool's command, Nick discovers yet another negative side to his old school-fellow. Widmerpool as a superior is secretive, out only for his own advantage, and terrified that somebody else might reap the rewards of his own work. Again, this highlights Widmerpool's perpetual insecurity regarding his own position and achievements. Nick's use of words such as 'fear' and 'obsession' (*SA*, p. 270) to describe Widmerpool's attitude adds further strength to the argument.

Placing personal success above all else, Widmerpool has no qualms at the thought of abandoning Nick when it comes to a possible promotion, despite earlier promises regarding arrangements for 'a future preferable to assignment' (*SA*, p. 274). Again, their world views clash. Nick expects a helping hand from Widmerpool, not only as a superior but also as an old acquaintance; for Widmerpool, the idea of personal merit outweighs the ties of acquaintance. And although Widmerpool's lack of compassion is unpleasant, his argument is valid. Nick has to learn that advancement is due to ability, not mere connection. The Second World War indeed served as a watershed in enabling capable men to work their way up for the good of the country; it was not merely a question of obtaining commissions from influential friends. Powell's emphasis again highlights the different tone employed by the two men. Whether or not Widmerpool is right is not the point. What is important is that he once again reveals himself as a patronizing egomaniac, and this highlights Powell's preoccupation with power, and how people use it, or in Widmerpool's case, *ab*use it.

Widmerpool's unscrupulous attitude is again apparent when juxtaposed with the behaviour of the upper-class character Stringham. From the outset of the narrative, Stringham is singled out by Nick for his tragic beauty, which resembles 'Veronese's Alexander' (*QU*, p. 8). This stands in stark contrast to Widmerpool's oft-mentioned odd looks. But despite all the early promise – everything seems to come effortlessly to him – Stringham's life does not follow the expected pattern, and he turns into an alcoholic dropout: leaving university without a degree, giving up work, and

divorcing his wife.[41] Stringham's family background might provide an answer for his troubled existence. Critics usually present him misleadingly as the aristocratic member of the trio he forms with Nick Jenkins and Peter Templer. Stringham's mother was first married to an aristocrat, but her second husband, Stringham's father, was the non-aristocratic Boffles Stringham. Stringham consequently will not inherit the life-interest in the estates his mother received from her first husband, and although he grows up in a pseudo-aristocratic environment, it comes without the added feudal duties which might structure his life. Added to which, as his parents' marriage breaks up, he is deprived of a role model. Instead of a male role model, Stringham has a dominant mother, whom he simultaneously adores and fears, and who might be responsible for his troubled sexuality, which at first manifests itself in a string of relationships with much older women, then a short-lived marriage, and finally, virtual celibacy.[42]

There are two important confrontations between Stringham and Widmerpool in the novel sequence, and both are indicative of the changing world order. The first comes in the third instalment when, after an old boys dinner, the inebriated Stringham is taken in hand by Widmerpool. While Stringham is still the superior socially, the successful and ambitious Widmerpool has left him far behind in all other respects, and has no problem showing his new superiority by packing Stringham off to bed: 'Widmerpool threw himself on top of him, holding Stringham bodily there. …' (*AW*, p. 720). This physical struggle can be read as a metaphor for the ongoing class struggle: energetic, upwardly mobile men like Widmerpool begin to dominate society; Stringham's class is slowly but steadily replaced.

It is only with the onset of war that Stringham seems to find some purpose to his life. He joins the army in the ranks. His arrival on the scene as mess waiter constitutes another social upheaval: not only does he have to wait on his social inferiors but he seems content about it. He confides in Nick: '[B]eing in the ranks suits me. No strain … . Nobody asks you if you have read in this morning's *Times* that so-and-so's engaged or somebody else is getting a divorce. All that had begun to get me down for some reason. Make me tired' (*SA*, p. 328). In the army, Stringham feels comfortable among the men of the lower ranks, where everybody has their chore, and life is structured. He effectively condemns the idleness of the upper ranks of society, who spend too much time on idle society gossip. For Stringham, his lowly position in the army is a conscious choice, to make up for the dissipation of his earlier life.[43]

Widmerpool, by contrast, feels threatened by the arrival of Stringham, displaying 'increasing signs of uneasiness and irritation' and fearing that '"[h]e might easily

41 All his life, Stringham seems to be running away: from responsibility; from his family; from himself. This is foreshadowed in the first instalment of the novel sequence when he remarks: 'I am seriously thinking of running away and joining the Foreign Legion or the North-West Mounted Police' (*QU*, p. 174).

42 See, for example, *SA*, p. 330, when Stringham admits that he seems 'to have lost all interest [in girls]. Isn't that strange? … My great amusement now is trying to get things straight in my own mind'.

43 Incidentally, Stringham remarks to Nick on the 'rhythm' he has found in the army, which keeps him busy, and his day well-structured, something his life had lacked before: 'what I'm doing is what I've *chosen* to do' (*SA*, p. 326; emphasis mine).

prove a source of embarrassment if he gets into trouble"' (*SA*, p. 320). Widmerpool is worried about the repercussions Stringham's possible bad behaviour might have on his own reputation and career, and covertly uses his influence to arrange for Stringham's transfer to a different unit. Nick's initial reaction at the news shows that he is still a political naïf. He believes that Widmerpool has transferred Stringham merely in recognition of his upper-class background, which deserves a better position than that of a waiter. But Widmerpool calculatingly picks a Mobile Laundry Unit due to leave for Singapore where, eventually, Stringham dies in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp. In a perverse twist of fate, Stringham's exaggerated schoolboy complaint – '"That boy will be the death of me"' (*QU*, p. 49) – comes true. In the ultimate role reversal, Widmerpool, once the butt of Stringham's practical jokes at school, is now in a position to make life-or-death decisions about Stringham, and he abuses this power. The case of Stringham finally proves to Nick that he and Widmerpool have opposing outlooks on life, and he emphasizes that henceforth he salutes 'the uniform, as one was always told, rather than the man' (*MP*, 592).

The last three instalments of the novel are of particular interest for the development of class divides and notions of gentlemanliness. They are also replete with social commentary, especially about the immediate post-war conditions.

For Widmerpool, the post-war years bring a boost in responsibility and power. It is, however, a power increasingly at odds with Nick's conception of how the world ought to be run, and by whom. Widmerpool himself is perfectly aware of the decisive social changes brought about by the war. Already before the war, he had predicted that '"we are going to see some great changes, Nicholas … and welcome ones. There is much – as I have often said before – to be swept away. I feel sure the things I speak of will be swept away. A new broom will soon get to work. I venture to hope that I may myself participate in this healthier society to which we may look forward"' (*CCR*, p. 369). During the later stages of the war, Widmerpool gained confidence in his prediction: '"The point is, we are going to see great changes. … Men like myself will be needed"' (*MP*, p. 686). Widmerpool proves more far-sighted than many of his contemporaries, as the July 1945 landslide election victory of the Labour Party under Clement Atlee, defeating war-victor Winston Churchill, came as a shock and surprise to many Britons, including the King himself.[44]

Widmerpool's language deserves another closer look. His patronizing tone is immediately apparent in the way he insists on addressing Nick as 'Nicholas' – he is the only character in the book to do so. His social predictions again highlight his self-obsession. It is exactly his statement 'Men like myself will be needed' that must be examined. As Widmerpool predicts, fundamental social change requires men of vision and imagination. Widmerpool possesses neither; just a narrow-minded regularity.

Widmerpool is proud to echo that 'we are the masters now' (*BDFR*, p. 73), aligning himself with the lower classes who, in his opinion, have won the war, and are now

44 See Anthony Howard, '"We are the Masters Now": The General Election of 5 July 1945', in Michael Sissons and Philip French (eds), *Age of Austerity 1945–51* (Harmondsworth, 1964), p. 15.

reaping the rewards. This political trend of the mid to late 1940s came hand in hand with a marked decline in the aristocracy. The decline undergone by the aristocracy – in *Dance* represented by Nick's in-laws, the Tolland family – is not only financial. Thrubworth, their ancestral seat, had, like so many stately homes, been requisitioned during the war. After the death of the head of the family, Erridge, the family have to face increasing uncertainty with regard to their future: George Tolland, the second son, had preceded Erridge to the grave by a few weeks, leaving a pregnant wife. Nick recalls that 'the question of the baby's sex, in the light of inheritance, added another uncertainty in the present situation' (*BDFR*, p. 29). This uncertainty does not affect only the Tolland family, but is representative of the aristocracy as a whole. With a Labour government in power, the aristocracy feared for their centuries-old privileges. This is echoed in a general reluctance on the part of the aristocrats to take on any further duties. The youngest Tolland brother's fervent prayer 'Pray God it will be a boy. … I used to think I'd like to take it all on, but no longer …' (*BDFR*, p. 39) is indicative of the changed times, in which it would be an almost pointless exercise to take on aristocratic responsibilities.

Most poignant for the decline of the aristocracy and its privileges is the presence of the new man Widmerpool at Erridge's funeral; and it is a conspicuous presence, because Widmerpool's noisy arrival disrupts the ceremony, and hammers home the message that Erridge's funeral must be read as a metaphor for the old order being laid to rest by the new man.[45]

Widmerpool's last power struggle is his relation with cult-leader Scorpio Murtlock. Under the sect's influence, he becomes deranged; rumours abound that he is mentally disturbed, and that his former leftish tendencies have become radical. In his struggle for leadership of the sect, he is repeatedly defeated by Murtlock, who, in a renewal of roles, emerges as another Nietzschean superman in the Widmerpudlian vein. Nick gleans only a hazy idea of the actual humiliations suffered by Widmerpool: the verbal and physical abuse, the decimation of his fortune, the daily humbling in front of other acolytes. The last instalment of the novel proves that everything has its limit – even Widmerpool's will to power. During a naked midnight run, he makes one final bid to gain control of the sect, urging the group members to a higher speed, and openly defying Scorpio's orders to slow down. The exhaustion, caused both by the run, and by his perpetual power struggle, is too much. Widmerpool dies on the forest path, his last words 'I'm leading. I'm leading now' (*HSH*, p. 799). In his eyes, he has reached his objective: he dies leading. Throughout his life, Widmerpool, incapable of reconciling himself to being under somebody else's control, fought to satisfy his hunger for power. The 'Secret Harmonies' conjured up by the title of the last instalment have certainly never been heard by Widmerpool. Unable to relax his guard and feel secure in his position, Widmerpool has to live with the knowledge that, for him, the race goes on forever.

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45 Widmerpool's attitude towards the aristocracy does not change with his own elevation to the rank of Life Peer after the 1955 elections: '"Not very contemporary, such a designation sounds today"' (*TK*, p. 352). He sees the House of Lords as something from an earlier age, clearly not in keeping with present times, but which he might nevertheless use to increase his influence.

The novel ends as it has begun: with an image of Widmerpool running into the mist, a *mise-en-abîme* which shows the importance of his character to the narrative. This importance is also reflected in the many and contradictory opinions of him expressed throughout the novel sequence. He regards himself as, among many other things, an 'intellectual in the world of action' (*TK*, p. 258); Nick sees him as 'the greatest bourgeois who ever lived' (*TK*, p. 262); others consider him as 'the Frog Footman' (*BM*, p. 294; *BDFR*, p. 101), a 'whited sepulchre,' a 'serpent' and a 'small-time Judas' (*AW*, p. 720); 'an absolute bugger', 'a hundred percent bastard' (*KO*, p. 641); as 'an able fellow, not a man to offend' (*TVB*, p. 119); as 'a professional trafficker in intrigue' (*SA*, p. 278); as 'Coprolite! Faecal debris! Fossil of dung!' (*BDFR*, p. 204); as 'a great nobleman of the Old School' (*TK*, p. 292); 'not man enough' (*TK*, p. 340); as 'very efficient … A really good officer' (*TK*, p. 453); as perfect to have personified 'the eighth Sin – Humbug' (*HSH*, p. 594); as 'not far from making himself into a Holy Man' (*HSH*, p. 620); as 'not at all conventional' (*HSH*, p. 637); as 'rather a shit' (*HSH*, p. 672); as 'the most horrible man on earth' (*HSH*, p. 734), as a 'château-bottled shit' (*HSH*, p. 784) and so on. While Nick is a gentleman of the old school, Widmerpool is more difficult to define. Felber explains that he 'is a parody of ambitious nineteenth-century protagonists. … As an agent of narrative desire, Widmerpool is an equivocal figure. He stimulates curiosity. … Yet [he] is an elusive character, neither hero nor villain, politically and personally amorphous, a social chameleon who changes color with each new social era'.[46] This again points to Widmerpool's innate insecurity, which makes him chase from one position of power to the next. But Widmerpool is in a no-win situation. Dissatisfied with the station in life he has been born into, he arouses the suspicion of his social superiors, who fear him because his constant increase in power infringes on their privileges. They regard him as a traitor to his class; firstly, because he wants to be upwardly mobile, and secondly, because he becomes an MP in a Labour government, which goes directly against them and against their privileges. From there, it is but a small step to Widmerpool's being labelled a traitor to his country, when suspicions are voiced as to his being in Soviet pay. This awakes memories of the notorious gentlemen spies of post-war Britain, Burgess, Maclean and their associates, whose social standing opened for them all doors to the Establishment, which they abused by spying for the Soviets.

The difference between narrator Nick and antagonist Widmerpool characterizes the fundamental struggle in the novel. Mizener defines this conflict as that between imagination and will, Gutierrez echoes this by calling it the struggle between artist and philistine.[47] The many class-related issues in the novel serve merely to frame the real battle: Nick and many of his friends are men of imagination; they write, compose, paint or simply relish all things beautiful. Widmerpool is a man of will; he cares neither for the arts nor for books – '"It doesn't do to read too much. … You get to look at life with a false perspective"' (*QU*, p. 134) – nor is he tied to

46 Felber, 'A Text of Arrested Desire': 580.

47 See Mizener, 'The Novels of Anthony Powell': 82 ff., and Gutierrez, 'The Discrimination of Elegance': 132.

his fellow human beings by emotional links.[48] His personification of laissez-faire economics and elbow politics highlights his life motto: 'Every man for himself'. Widmerpool expects nothing of his fellows, so nothing, as he sees it, can be expected of him. He is ruthless, calculating, unimaginative; but still oddly intriguing. Mizener explains that, with the difference between men of imagination and men of will, 'a major contrast of twentieth-century natures is implied'.[49] This difference can also be seen in the characters' differing opinions regarding gentlemanliness. For Nick, the gentlemanly code he has grown up with has proven a successful means to leading his life, and a fulfilling life at that. As the instalments of the novel proceed, his detached attitude is occasionally marred by a slight melancholy about changed times and patterns of behaviour. But this melancholy does not manifest itself in open nostalgia. It is merely a reflection on changes which, he feels, need not have been. And these changes are largely exemplified by Widmerpool, who clearly overreaches himself in his struggle for power.

For Widmerpool, the concept of the gentleman is out of keeping with modern times. Early on in his career he commented that it was '"no good being too gentlemanly"' (*SA*, p. 454). With this he indicates that being too gentlemanly might function as an impediment to one's career. If one thinks back to Nick's romantic blunder at La Grenadière, one can see Widmerpool's reasoning. Modern times might demand snap, and sometimes unpopular, decisions.

Throughout the sequence, Widmerpool becomes increasingly vindictive about the old order which, as he sees it, has restrained too many lives for too long. During an impromptu speech at an awards ceremony, he announces: '"I take pride in ridiculing what is – or rather was – absurdly called honour, respectability, law, order, obedience, custom, rule, hierarchy, precept, regulation, all that is insidiously imposed by the morally, ideologically, and spiritually naked, and politically bankrupt, on those they have oppressed and do oppress"' (*HSH*, p. 641). This is a key scene in the novel, and one which deserves closer scrutiny. Widmerpool's rhetoric is pompous, but it sounds distinctly hollow. His speech, meant to be his final leave-taking of an older order, resembles a battle cry for anarchy. He openly rejects a code of gentlemanly behaviour which had been in existence for centuries, and declares it out of keeping with modern times. It is particularly noteworthy that 'honour' is the first term he mentions. Honour, always a key concept of gentlemanly behaviour, has undergone so many changes over the past centuries – from men fighting duels over it in the eighteenth century, to gentlemen giving their word of honour throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Widmerpool's emotional outburst shows that he has not only turned his back on questions of honour altogether, but he also considers those who still believe in it as out of touch with modern reality. Holding forth against the 'morally, ideologically, and spiritually naked, and politically bankrupt',

48 With this pompous statement, Widmerpool proves himself to be the antithesis of Carlyle's 'Man of Letters'. Carlyle had stated explicitly that 'the place where we are to get knowledge, even theoretic knowledge, is … Books. … It depends on what we read. … The true University of these days is a Collection of Books' (Carlyle, 'The Hero as Man of Letters', p. 192).

49 Mizener, 'The Novels of Anthony Powell': 83.

he turns directly against the upper-middle-classes, the former rulers of the Empire, who are still trying to cling on to power and influence, despite the fact that they are no longer fit to be rulers. This attitude in a fictional character reflects real-life attitudes in British society of the early 1950s. Martin Green explains that Churchill's re-election in 1951, which again ousted Labour from power, 'was not one of a happy return to old traditions; indeed there was a general call for England to give up its political reliance on "gentlemen" and gentlemanly amateurishness. … Justly or not, the "Establishment" was blamed for most of Britain's ills …'.[50]

At the outset of this chapter, a possible link between Widmerpool and the Angry Young Men was suggested, certainly accounted for by his anti-Establishment stance. Powell was himself interested in the Movement, and was a friend of one of the leading 'Angries', Kingsley Amis.[51] But his interest appears to have been of a mainly stylistic nature, in the depiction of the struggle for power. Widmerpool is a confident philistine figure of the old order. He condemns the Establishment, but still tries to make it work for himself, in order to gain maximum power. His attempts at 'blowing up' the old order from within must consequently be questioned. So while Widmerpool is different from the heroes of Angry literature – he is more complacent where they are anxious – it can still be assumed that the ongoing power-debates in contemporary literature influenced Powell, who, in Widmerpool, suggests that 'Angry Young Man-ism' may bring out old-style philistinism.

In contrast to Widmerpool, Nick still believes in the concepts of honour, hierarchy and custom. But he realizes that '[o]ne returned to a different world' (*BDFR*, p. 94) after the war. On one level, this comment refers to the fact that the post-war world is different from the world at war. More crucially, Nick's world is now different, because its social order has changed to a 'world … in … a state of flux' (*MP*, p. 676). His comments, and those of his friends, become more wistful.[52] But there are more subtle indicators of a changing world order. During the war, Stringham ponders '"I'm trying to memorise some of his jokes for use at dinner parties after the war … if there are any given *après la guerre*"' (*SA*, p. 467). He is aware that the changing social world will no longer be peopled by Bright Young Things dancing from one social engagement to another. This attitude is voiced repeatedly after the war, sometimes subtly, for example in comments about changes in fashion. At Erridge's post-war funeral, for example, there is a notable absence of silk hats: '"Thought it would be alright – best – not to wear a silk hat. See you haven't either, nor the rest of the men. … Not in keeping with the way we live nowadays"' (*BDFR*, p. 63).[53] During

50 Martin Green, *Children of the Sun: A Narrative of Decadence in England after 1918* (London, 1977), p. 446.

51 In a review of *Lucky Jim* for *Punch*, Powell labels him as 'the first promising young novelist who has appeared for a long time' (See Anthony Powell, *To Keep the Ball Rolling: The Memoirs of Anthony Powell* [London, 1983], p. 412).

52 There is, for example, Prince Theodoric's lament '"By Jove, those were the days. … We didn't know how lucky we were"' (*MP*, p. 530), the actor Norman Chandler's comment '"What fun it all was in those days"' (*HSH*, p. 594), or the musician Moreland's jokes about being 'suffocated by nostalgia' (*TK*, p. 476) and losing his 'head for nostalgia' (*TK*, p. 495).

53 Incidentally, Evelyn Waugh's *Unconditional Surrender*, published 10 years before, includes a similar sentence. At the funeral of Crouchback senior, one of the mourners confides:

the 1970s, Nick realizes at a literary award ceremony that things have changed at such events, too: 'It was not an evening-dress affair' (*HSH*, p. 618). These are subtle indicators of a new era where changes, as far as the narrator and his friends are concerned, come at the expense of formality and style.

Anthony Powell professed himself surprised at the success of his creation of Widmerpool. In an interview he admitted that 'I certainly have been [surprised]. Of course, I had always planned him for one of the "link" people. I was quite unprepared for his popularity. … I don't think I ever planned to have him taking "charge" the way he has'.[54] This important statement points to a certain ambiguity on the part of the author towards his creation, which needs to be expanded.

In order to do so, we must once more clarify Powell's intentions in writing *Dance*, and in creating the two juxtaposed characters of Nick and Widmerpool – and question his success. Powell's intention, especially with regard to his application of the 'gentleman' trope, is clear. His aim was to show that it is possible to maintain gentlemanly values and standards throughout a lifetime, even in a changing world. To achieve this, he created a narrator who is representative of his own lifestyle and social class. In order to highlight Nick's decency, Powell juxtaposes him with the obnoxious and patronizing social chameleon Widmerpool, who craves influence and power, and who mercilessly uses his elbows in the battle of life.

But Widmerpool's character highlights a certain ambiguity within the author. During the later stages of his life, Powell was an avowed admirer of Margaret Thatcher.[55] It has to be remembered that *Dance* was completed in 1975, four years before Thatcher came to power, so the following point should not be overstressed. But Widmerpool, ever a harbinger of new trends, could indeed be read as a type which would later be labelled 'Thatcherite'. D.J. Taylor defines the Thatcherite hero as 'picaresque, ruthless, upwardly mobile … with which … older types of character … were usually unable to contend'.[56] These characteristics easily fit Widmerpool, and Nick's gentle manners cannot compete with Widmerpool's bullying. But how could Powell admire Thatcherism, while despising a quintessentially Thatcherite hero at the same time? This ambiguity was mirrored in Thatcher, the Prime Minister who called for a return to old-fashioned moral values, but simultaneously advocated elbow politics. In a 1988 *Daily Mail* interview, she praised the 1950s, and blamed

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'"I'm not wearing a top hat. … Seems out of place these days"' (*US*, p. 59). This clearly emphasizes the subtlety authors such as Powell and Waugh used in order to note change in contemporary society through fashion.

54 Douglas M. Davis, 'An Interview with Anthony Powell', *College English* 24 (1963): 533.

55 Powell's memoirs and journals show that he was in thrall to her physical appearance, because it oozes power. See Anthony Powell, *Journals 1982–1986* (London, 1995), pp. 38–40 (descriptions of the Prime Minister in this section label her as 'the Answer' [p. 38], 'very attractive' and 'physically desirable' [p. 40]), 139–42, and 217; Anthony Powell, *Journals 1987–1989* (London, 1995), p. 133; Anthony Powell, *Journals 1990–1992* (London, 1997), p. 82.

56 D.J. Taylor, *After the War: The Novel and England Since 1945* (London, 1993), p. 281.

the 1960s for a general deterioration of manners and morals: 'Permissiveness, selfish and uncaring, proliferated under the guise of new sexual freedom. Aggressive verbal hostility, presented as a refreshing lack of subservience, replaced courtesy and good manners. Instant gratification became the philosophy of the young and the youth cultists. Speculation replaced dogged hard work.'[57] Sinfield points out the ambiguity of Thatcher whose 'story gives her a problem … for aggression, selfishness, discourtesy, speculation and even freedom are linked in at least some people's minds with economic individualism'.[58]

With regard to these findings, *A Dance to the Music of Time* becomes an even more intriguing text, especially where the figure of the gentleman and his use as a literary trope are concerned. Overall, in Nick, Powell successfully depicted a believable traditional gentleman. He created a character who sticks to his moral values over the course of half a century. Occasionally, Nick stumbles, and is shown to overreact, or to react in the wrong way. But it is these slight inconsistencies which make him more believable. His overall gentlemanliness is not diminished by them. In juxtaposing Nick with the unpleasant Widmerpool, Powell shows his dislike of changing social and moral attitudes. But he also demonstrates the impact of power. His own attraction to the most power-driven Prime Minister of the twentieth century shows that not even a staunch believer in traditional moral values could *quite* resist the lure of a powerful character. Nevertheless, Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time* succeeds through its slight ambiguity, which perfectly depicts its characters', and, importantly, its creator's attempts to come to terms with the confusion of the changing times.

57 See the interview with Margaret Thatcher, *Daily Mail* (29 April 1988), quoted in Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (Oxford, 1989), p. 296.

58 Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, p. 297.

Chapter 6

Arcadia Revisited? Evelyn Waugh's Gentlemen

Evelyn Waugh and His Critics

In late 1940, Evelyn Waugh told his wife Laura: 'I think I shall start writing a book, for my own pleasure, probably not for publication – a kind of modern Arcadia.'[1] The book in question was *Brideshead Revisited*, a novel which fiercely divided Waugh's admirers from his critics, and was generally considered a watershed in the author's writing, a turn away from the biting satire of his early work towards the apologetic, nostalgic style of his later fiction. Some claim it is by far his best achievement, while others complain that it is the worst of all his novels. Waugh himself stated that 'this novel … lost me such esteem as I once enjoyed among my contemporaries' (*BR*, p. 7). Bergonzi explains that 'this long, lush, glittering story about an aristocratic Catholic family between the wars, seen through the eyes of an all too obviously fascinated hanger-on, who is the intimate friend of one of them and becomes the lover of another, was rather too much for many readers'.[2] Karl complains that '[t]here are intermittent passages … reminiscent of the former Waugh, but here, whether his power has weakened or his intention simply changed, irony is lost. The story is a kind of … morality drama'; O'Donnell criticizes Waugh's 'almost idolatrous reverence for birth and wealth'; Pryce-Jones points out that the work is 'deeply melancholic, casting a miasma, half-poetic and half-apologetic across the *fin-de-siècle* disintegration of the Marchmain family'; Toynbee judges Waugh as 'lower[ing] his defensive mask and reveal[ing] behind the grin a deep schwärmerei for the golden dignities of a mythical upper class'; and Pearce condemns it as 'a hymnal to the true English vice … snobbery!', and assesses that '*Brideshead Revisited* is the story of Waugh/Ryder's shrewdly judged attempt to buy himself a season ticket into the landed gentry'.[3] The debate rages up to this day. But no matter which position one takes, *Brideshead* is singular as 'both a panegyric

1 Evelyn Waugh, 'Letter to Laura Waugh (November 1940)', in *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Mark Amory (London, 1995), p. 146

2 Bernard Bergonzi, 'Evelyn Waugh's Gentlemen', *The Critical Quarterly* (Spring 1963): 27.

3 Frederick R. Karl, *A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel* (London, 1963), p. 173; Donat O'Donnell, 'Review of *Brideshead Revisited*', *Bell* (December 1946): 38–49, reprinted in Martin Stannard (ed.), *Evelyn Waugh: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1984), p. 257; David Pryce-Jones, 'Review of *Brideshead Revisited*', *Time and Tide* (23th July 1960): 863–64, reprinted in Stannard (ed.), *The Critical Heritage*, p. 273; Philip Toynbee, 'Review of *Brideshead Revisited*', *The Observer* (29 October 1961): 21, reprinted in Stannard

and valediction, inspired by a yearning for a lost arcadia; inspired also by Evelyn's romantic veneration of the aristocracy, of the past, and of English Catholicism'.[4] *Brideshead* was Waugh's reaction to a world changing before his eyes, and as he saw it, not changing for the better. According to Raphael, Waugh composed *Brideshead* in an 'elegiac mode, to announce his belief in a vanished way of life which had been at once grandiose and, in his wishful eyes, responsible'.[5] Waugh was disenchanted with what he perceived as decline; the 'Age of the Common Man' frightened him and made him fiercely protective of, as he considered it, a better past. Lodge explains that 'the myth of decline is as old as man's nostalgia for a pastoral paradise lost, but it acquires a special importance in nineteenth and twentieth century literature which … has tended to invert the Enlightenment graph of human history as an upward curve of inevitable Progress, and to point instead to an accelerating deterioration in the quality of life'.[6] In his letters and journalism, Waugh elaborated a lot on the idea of progress, and on his own attitude towards it. He sternly admonished his friend Nancy Mitford for her use of the word 'progressive', writing that 'if we are to continue friends, never use the word … in writing to me. … It makes me sick and agitated for hours to read it'.[7] In his 1946 article for *Life* magazine, 'Fan-Fare', he expounds upon the use of satire in modern times, explaining that it

> flourishes in a stable society and presupposes homogenous moral standards. … It is aimed at inconsistency and hypocrisy. It exposes polite cruelty and folly by exaggerating them. It seeks to produce shame. All this has no place in the Century of the Common Man where vice no longer pays lip service to virtue. The artist's only service to the disintegrated society of today is to create little independent systems of order of his own.[8]

There is nothing, Waugh believes, left to satirize. This attitude is responsible for the shortcomings of his later work. Once he stops using satire, his fiction becomes mainly condemnatory. As Waugh saw it in 1946, the present was bleak, the future even more so, and all that was left for him was to build up his own (fantasy) world. In Waugh's case, that meant retreating into nostalgia for a past which never really existed. His was a yearning for 'the good old days' when people knew their place and how to behave; when, in Raphael's words, 'paternalism was axiomatic in a class system where, as [Waugh] saw it, rank was not negotiable and duties were not a matter of opinion'.[9] Raphael sees *Brideshead* in particular as 'both a celebration and a lament for a pampered paradise which he now took to be lost forever; … It was

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(ed.), *The Critical Heritage*, p. 434; Edward Pearce, 'Brideshead Resisted', *Quadrant* 26/7 (July 1982): 59.

4 Selina Hastings, *Evelyn Waugh: A Biography* (London, 1994), p. 482.

5 Frederic Raphael, 'Revisiting Brideshead: A Re-Introduction', *PN-Review* 21/4 (March – April 1995): 29.

6 David Lodge, *Evelyn Waugh* (New York, 1971), p. 6.

7 Evelyn Waugh, 'Letter to Nancy Mitford (16 October 1946)', in *The Letters of Nancy Mitford & Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Charlotte Mosley (London, 1997), p. 55.

8 Evelyn Waugh, 'Fan-Fare' (1946), in *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Donat Gallagher (London, 1983), p. 304.

9 Raphael, 'Revisiting Brideshead': 29.

goodbye to the durability of the world which had garnished his youthful satires with the characters and social *mores* which he had both mocked and adulated'.[10] Waugh became increasingly outspoken about the lack of proper behaviour and manners around him. When, in an article, his friend Cecil Beaton applauds the younger generation for being better mannered again, Waugh shakes his head in disbelief and concludes: 'I think I know Mr. Beaton's motive. There is no surer way of creating a fashion than by stating that it already exists. If we go on for long enough proclaiming the return of courtesy and etiquette they are sure to come. Meanwhile we still have to suffer.'[11]

This obsession with manners alone would not have made Waugh his enemies and critics. It was – especially in the later novels – his equation of good manners with the upper class which made him unpopular with many of his contemporaries, and which today earns him the predicates 'reactionary' and 'snob'. Waugh, himself of an artistic middle-class family, venerated the upper classes and especially the aristocracy, and all his life he hoped to join their ranks. In post-Second-World-War Britain, he lamented that 'class-consciousness, particularly in England, has been so much inflamed nowadays that to mention a nobleman is like mentioning a prostitute sixty years ago. … [But] I reserve the right to deal with the kind of people I know best'.[12] This recalls Powell's defence of his subject matter in *A Dance to the Music of Time*. However, there is a difference between the two writers. Crucially, Powell did not share the negative attitude towards the lower classes which mars Waugh's work. While Powell calmly chronicled the changing times and particularly the changing *tone* in society, Waugh, in contrast, retreated into a nostalgia that stemmed from his own disillusion with his times. Powell felt sad about the changes in society but looked towards the future, whereas Waugh ended up burying his head in the sand. He *did* realize that the values he admired no longer counted; but maybe he hoped that by writing about them he could indeed start a new fashion.

Waugh's infatuation with class makes his novels also particularly English. Toynton writes of her teenage reading of *Brideshead* that:

> [it] *was* England to me … nothing so mundane as a rainy island, the center of a vanishing empire, but a condition of heightened romance, the ultimate state of grace. In England, I was sure, people were not only wittier and more charming … but gentler, finer, more honorable. … *Brideshead Revisited* … was the apotheosis of Englishness.[13]

Toynton's is clearly an over-romanticized England. Nevertheless, *Brideshead* – like most of Waugh's work – *appears* to be very *English.* The setting enhances this: country houses, London society, not to mention the author's preoccupation with class, which is arguably the true English obsession. But we have to query whether it was really Waugh's intention to create typically *English* works of fiction. After

10 Raphael, 'Revisiting Brideshead': 29.

11 Evelyn Waugh, 'Such Appalling Manners' (1930), in *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, p. 78.

12 Waugh, 'Fan-Fare', p. 304.

13 Evelyn Toynton, 'Rereading *Brideshead Revisited*', *The American Scholar* 67/4 (Autumn 1998): 134–5.

all, novels like *Brideshead Revisited* or the *Sword of Honour* trilogy stem directly from the author's personal *dis*illusion with his native land, which had, in his eyes, lost its lustre, its honour and its sense of right direction. Waugh's disenchantment was so great that he contemplated emigrating to Ireland, a move forcefully resisted by his wife. In 1946, Waugh wrote to Nancy Mitford that 'I am anxious to emigrate, Laura to remain & face the century of the common man. … If only they would start blowing the place up with their atoms'.[14] In a letter to Lady Diana Cooper the same year, he referred to the 'accursed soil of England'.[15] An England not only peopled, but governed by Hoopers and Trimmers is not a happy home for Waugh. His fiction, therefore, does not represent a real England, but his personal *Jerusalem*; it contrasts an ideal of what England *might* be with the squalid reality Waugh feels it has become.

In a study of Waugh's work, the private persona of the author and the changing phases of his life cannot be left unconsidered, and the *man* Waugh has to be seen as reflected by and in his writing. Green comments, for example, that *Brideshead* is 'a remarkable fantasy-autobiography, and a culture history of his generation'.[16] For Waugh, more than for any other writer discussed in this book, social background and position at the time of writing a certain work of fiction played a crucial part. His early work reflects the young and rebellious Evelyn Waugh, a member of the party-going circle of Bright Young Things. After the collapse of his first marriage and his conversion to Catholicism, Waugh's writing and his attitude to society changed, and this can be seen in his depiction of the gentleman. His early novels look at the ideal with a raised eyebrow, poking fun at its shortcomings; his later work idolizes it. This chapter will not attempt to provide a literary biography of Waugh, as several excellent works to that effect already exist.[17] But certain references to his life, more so than with any of the other authors discussed here, will have to be made, in order not only to assess, but also to problematize his attitude towards the figure of 'the gentleman'. The title of the following section – *Arcadia Revisited?* with a prominent question mark – already hints at the potential problem of presentation in Waugh's work. Did he *invent* an Arcadian (and consequently mythical) image of the gentleman, rather than presenting a reality? Toynbee famously wrote about Waugh's depiction of 'a *mythical* upper class' in *Brideshead*.[18] Waugh increasingly retreated from the despised real world to a fantasy world of his own making, of chivalric lords and perfect gentlemen.

But Waugh's take on the gentleman is problematic, if only because of his own behaviour. Too blunt, too outspoken, and, it has to be said, too rude, too inclined

14 Waugh, 'Letter to Nancy Mitford (16 October 1946)', p. 55.

15 Evelyn Waugh, 'Letter to Lady Diana Cooper (1946?)', quoted in Martin Stannard, *Evelyn Waugh: No Abiding City 1939–1966* (London, 1992), p. 163.

16 Martin Green, *The English Novel in the Twentieth Century (The Doom of Empire)* (London, 1984), p. 123.

17 See, for example, Martin Stannard's detailed two-volume biography of Waugh, *Evelyn Waugh: The Early Years 1903–1939* (London, 1986), and *Evelyn Waugh: No Abiding City 1939–1966*, as well as John Howard Wilson's *Evelyn Waugh: A Literary Biography, 1924–1966* (Madison, NJ, 2001).

18 Toynbee, 'Review of *Brideshead Revisited*': 434, emphasis mine.

to rowdy drunkenness and general lewd behaviour, Waugh's own manners do not conform to the high standard against which he measured everybody else; in other words, they do not match the behaviour of an ideal gentleman.

Waugh's literary legacy is too large to investigate here as a whole. While most of his fictional works will receive some mention, the focus will be on his first novel, *Decline and Fall*, on his transitional novel *Brideshead Revisited*, and on his last fictional work, the *Sword of Honour* trilogy, consisting of the individual works *Men at Arms*, *Officers and Gentlemen* and *Unconditional Surrender*.

Arcadia Revisited? Waugh, Nostalgia and the Idea of the Gentleman

'It never occurred to me to think that I wasn't a gentleman until Lady Burghclere pointed it out', Evelyn Waugh wrote to Nancy Mitford in January 1952, 24 years after Her Ladyship's objections to him as a husband for her daughter, the Honourable Evelyn Gardner.[19] Although Waugh treated the subject jokingly in this letter, Lady Burghclere's snub had hurt in 1928, and had dealt a serious blow to his self-esteem, from which he tried to recover unsuccessfully. Bogaards writes that:

> the term "gentleman" is central to any discussion of class but defined even by the dictionary in very different ways. Lady Burghclere used it in the sense of "a man of good social standing, as a noble or an armigerous commoner," the most restricted definition, and also in the sense of "a man with an independent income who does not work for a living." Waugh doubtless used it of himself in its least confining sense: "a man of good breeding, education and manners".[20]

In later life, he increasingly came to associate it with the gentility and the nobility. In 1956, Waugh wrote to Nancy Mitford that 'everything turns on "the grand old name of gentleman." We have no equivalent phrase in English to "*noblesse oblige*." All precepts of manners and morals define the proper conduct of "gentlemen"'.[21] He points out that:

> the basic principle of English social life is that *everyone … thinks he is a gentleman*. There is a second principle of almost equal importance: *everyone draws the line of demarcation immediately below his own heels*. The professions rule out the trades; the Services, the professions; the Household Brigade, the line regiments; squires, squireens; landed families who had London houses ruled out those who spent all the year at home; … It is essentially a process of ruling *out*. … few well-bred people are aware, still less observant, of more than a small fraction of this code. Most people have a handful of taboos. … For example, there is … a jolly, badly dressed baron. He and I were talking one day when there passed an acquaintance, a grandee, a member of the Jockey Club, [the baron's] superior and *a*

19 Evelyn Waugh, 'Letter to Nancy Mitford (8 January 1952)', in *The Letters of Nancy Mitford & Evelyn Waugh*, p. 258.

20 Winnifred M. Bogaards, 'Evelyn Waugh's England: Class in *Decline and Fall*', *Swansea Review* (1994): 129.

21 Evelyn Waugh, 'An Open Letter to the Hon[ble] Mrs Peter Rodd (Nancy Mitford) on a Very Serious Subject', in Nancy Mitford (et al.), *Noblesse Oblige: An Enquiry into the Identifiable Characteristics of the English Aristocracy* (London, 1956), p. 73.

> *fortiori* mine. [The baron] … regarded this sleek, russet figure with aversion and said, with deep seriousness: "My father told me that no gentleman ever wore a brown suit."[22]

Waugh was acutely conscious of the shortcomings of his contemporary society. He realized that most people had only a hazy idea of what exactly it meant to be a gentleman, and that demarcation lines could be drawn randomly and haphazardly. Gentlemanliness could be equated with eating the right dishes at the right time, or with the avoidance of wearing a suit of the wrong colour. Waugh's idea of the gentleman was a more traditional one, steeped in chivalry, and tainted by his increasingly religious stance; in one form or another, it coloured most of his writing. To Nancy Mitford he wrote that '[the gentleman] is a fascinating subject. A book on it would be a best seller as it is still the first concern of 80% of the reading public. I think I may write it'.[23] Maybe the idea he had in mind was to write a manual of modern etiquette. As it was, shortly after this, he started work on the first instalment of the *Sword of Honour* trilogy, which is an elegy to the English gentleman, comparable only to Ford's *The Good Soldier* or *Parade's End*.[24]

Waugh's class-consciousness started at a tender age. When he was only four years old, his parents moved from Hampstead to North End, which was soon swallowed by the expansion of suburban Golders Green – and this address came to haunt Waugh. In his autobiography he writes that 'eventually … our postal address was altered … to Golders Green. My father deplored the change … Golders Green meant, to him, merely a tube station. I, at that self-conscious age, minded more, for I knew, as he did not, that the district had somehow acquired a slightly comic connotation … '.[25] He does not elaborate on this 'slightly comic connotation', but we might speculate about its origin. Golders Green meant suburbia, and for Waugh that meant petit bourgeoisie.[26] Carpenter writes that 'Christopher Hollis alleges that, as a young man, Evelyn "would walk to Hampstead to post his letters in order that they might bear a more aristocratic postmark"'.[27]

Waugh's discomfort at his parents' Golders Green residence increased with his own social elevation into the set of Bright Young Things, especially when he came

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22 Waugh, 'Open Letter', pp. 74–5.

23 Waugh, 'Letter to Nancy Mitford (8 January 1952)', p. 258.

24 Interestingly enough, already in 1949 Waugh had announced that he wanted 'to write a novel about the war. It would be a study of the idea of chivalry' (Waugh, quoted in Stannard, *No Abiding City*, p. 240). By 1951, Waugh was hard at work on *Men at Arms*, whose working title was, tellingly, *Honour* (see Stannard, *No Abiding City*, p. 301).

25 Evelyn Waugh, *A Little Learning. The First Volume of An Autobiography* (London, 1964), p. 35.

26 T.S. Eliot made extensively use of the setting of Golders Green for his series of ribald Bolo poems. See, for example, lines such as this: 'Bolo's big black bastard queen/ Was *so* obscene/ She shocked the folk of Golders Green' (T.S. Eliot, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot. Volume One. 1898–1922*, ed. Valerie Eliot [New York, 1988], p. 455). Gabrielle McIntire expands on Eliot's use of the suburb as the dubious marker for bourgeois morals. See 'An Unexpected Beginning: Sex, Race, and History in T.S. Eliot's Columbo and Bolo Poems', in *Modernism/ Modernity* 9/2 (April 2002): 283–301.

27 Humphrey Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation: Evelyn Waugh and His Friends* (London, 1989), p. 48.

to visit his new friends' far more imposing parental homes. Waugh, as Stannard points out, 'grew up with a profound sense of his gentility'.[28] An acute sense of his ancestry and an early recognition of his own intelligence gave way to exaggerated expectations regarding his education and social standing, which were bound to be disappointed. Waugh regretted all his life not having attended a more prestigious public school such as Eton, especially as many of his friends, among them Henry Yorke and Cyril Connolly, later claimed that they had spent their most formative years at Eton.[29] From childhood onwards, Waugh suffered from a paranoia about having everything second-hand, be it his childhood clothing, his inadequate school, or his success as an author, which came *after* his brother Alec's success. This might in part explain his craving for luxury and social prestige – it helped him over an innate inferiority complex. This class anxiety was shared by several of Waugh's friends and contemporaries: Cyril Connolly, for example, complained that:

> I could not consider myself entirely upper class; yet I was not altogether upper middle. I had fallen between two standards of living. With the upper class I felt awkward, dowdy, introspective and a physical coward. With the middle class I felt critical, impatient, and sparkling. This class distinction, the line between Kensington and Belgravia, is a source of anguish. … Why had my father not got a title? … Why be born, why live at all if I could not have one?[30]

Waugh *may* have had exalted ancestors, but he *was* middle class. His aristocratic friends made him aspire to greater things, without at the same time relinquishing the privileges which set them apart from him.[31] Stannard points out that Waugh 'was spoilt and petulant, angry at the world for not heaping honour upon him. Success seemed to come so effortlessly to his friends. He was blind to the self-discipline and industry of men like Acton, Byron, Quennell and Pares. … Money, he decided, was the key factor; money and social position. If he had been wealthy he too would have been making his mark in the arts by now'.[32] Once he started writing, all these feelings and insecurities found their way into his fiction.

The 1920s in England were a turbulent decade, as far as attitudes to masculinity were concerned. The young generation was expected to emulate their fathers' veneration for the late Victorian, stiff upper-lipped English gentleman: the hardy explorer and adventurous empire builder. The Great War, however, had changed

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28 Stannard, *The Early Years*, p. 11. Stannard also expands on the young Evelyn's 'superiority complex', which led him, even as a child, to make derogatory diary entries about 'street cads' and 'vile Southend trippers' (Stannard, *The Early Years*, 41). These comments became harsher with increasing age.

29 For more details on Waugh's schooling, see Stannard, *The Early Years*, pp. 36ff. For more details on his friends' experiences at Eton, see Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation*, pp. 30ff.

30 Cyril Connolly, quoted in Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation*, p. 20.

31 Waugh's biographers describe an incident in 1925, when he and his friend Matthew (later Baron) Ponsonby were arrested for drunken behaviour. Ponsonby was bailed out by his wealthy father, while Waugh was left in prison overnight. This experience rankled. See Wilson, *Evelyn Waugh*, p. 23 and Stannard, *The Early Years*, p. 111.

32 Stannard, *The Early Years*, p. 111.

that image. The survivors of the killing fields of Flanders perceived the War to have been a betrayal of their generation by their fathers, who had gladly sacrificed England's finest as cannon fodder. The young men and women of the late 1910s and 1920s recoiled from Empire and warfare: 'the ideals of patriarchal virtue no longer commanded the general imagination. … the Great War had meant … *public* disillusionment with the ideals of maturity cherished before.'[33] They rediscovered the dandies and aesthetes of the late nineteenth century, the likes of Wilde, Beerbohm and Firbank: writers who had been exposed to ridicule and even banned by their grandfathers and fathers, who were fearful of the effects of the aesthetes' effeminate behaviour on the hardy Empire builder. By emulating those artists both in style and attitude, the sons and daughters consciously revolted against their fathers' ideas. They created an alternative form of masculinity, which sought solace in decadence. Among the most prominent of those 'Children of the Sun' were, for example, the Prime Minister's son, Oliver Baldwin, 'fair-haired, … spoilt, unstable, homosexual and naïve', the Prince of Wales, 'youthful, slender, blond, ingenuous, pleasure-seeking', T.E. Lawrence, 'in his long robes and long hair, looking the reverse of the military type, with his virginal and narcissist beauty'.[34] Waugh soaked up this atmosphere and recreated it in his early fiction.

But Waugh was still troubled: he was torn between these two competing versions of masculinity. He felt attracted to the effeminate dandy aesthetes, especially during his time at Oxford. This was a reaction against his father, whom he saw as outdated. Simultaneously, however, he cherished the idea of power and of being a man of action, an attitude which eventually led him to condemn the frivolous behaviour of the Bright Young People. This division of masculine interests had started early on in Waugh's life. While at Lancing College, Waugh's admiration was divided equally between the effeminate and distinctly homosexual artist Francis Crease and the elegant J.F. Roxburgh, a distinguished veteran of the First World War who, despite getting Waugh interested in literature, was a man of action.[35] It was meeting Harold Acton and Brian Howard at Oxford which reconciled Waugh (for the time being) to his more effeminate side. At Oxford, homosexuality was practised freely. Hitherto, Waugh had experienced only the negative sides of homoeroticism, most notably his brother Alec's ignominious departure from public school for suspected homosexuality, and the public outrage at the publication of Alec's outspoken public-school novel, *The Loom of Youth*, in 1917. It was at Oxford that Waugh embarked on several homosexual relationships, most notably with Richard Pares and Alastair Graham.[36] Waugh's biographer Stannard expresses doubt as to whether or not the relationship with Pares ever found physical expression.[37] Waugh destroyed his Oxford diaries. In his autobiography, he writes of Pares 'I loved him dearly', but Carpenter quotes him as somewhat evasively referring to Pares as 'the first *friend* to whom I

33 Martin Green, *Children of the Sun: A Narrative of 'Decadence' in England after 1918* (London, 1977), p. 65.

34 See Green, *Children of the Sun*, pp. 72; 73; 74.

35 See Stannard, *The Early Years,* pp. 56; 58; 60.

36 See Stannard, *The Early Years*, pp. 69; 90.

37 See Stannard, *The Early Years*, p. 82.

gave my full devotion'.[38] Nevertheless, in a letter to Nancy Mitford in 1954, Waugh wrote about visiting 'my first *homosexual* love, Richard Pares'.[39] Similarly, Graham Greene recalled in his memoirs that 'Waugh … used to tease me. … He claimed that I had lost a great deal by not going through a homosexual phase'.[40] Interestingly enough, Alastair Graham is mentioned in Waugh's autobiography only under a pseudonym: 'His [Pares's] successor as the friend of my heart I will call Hamish Lennox.'[41] Even the index lists only 'Lennox, Hamish'; Alastair Graham, according to Waugh's autobiography, never featured in his life. This hints at the possibility that this second friendship was more intense and also found physical expression, and that it consequently had to be veiled by the use of a pseudonym. This can be supported by comments Waugh himself made to Christopher Sykes about experiencing an 'exteme homosexual phase … unrestrained, emotionally and physically' at Oxford, and also by two different letters written to Dudley Carew, in which he stated that 'I have been living very intensely the last three weeks. … My diary for the period is destroyed. I may perhaps one day in a later time tell you some of the things that have happened', and that 'I cannot yet explain all the things that are about me. St. John has been eating wild honey in the wilderness'.[42] The conclusion to draw is that Waugh conducted, if not necessarily *physically* homosexual relationships, intensely *homoerotic* friendships which later found their way into his fiction, most notably in the relationship between Ryder and Sebastian in *Brideshead*.

Despite this brief reconciliation to his more effeminate side during his time at Oxford, and despite the fact that most of his novels contain some effeminate, if not openly gay characters, Waugh had a troubled attitude towards his masculinity, and it did not take much to upset him. When, in 1928, a reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* mistook Waugh's gender and referred to him as Miss Waugh, he was furious. Perhaps his later drunken rowdiness and his lewd sexual comments to women were an attempt to establish himself as a 'man's man' in the eyes of the world.

The time Waugh spent among the Bright Young Things was formative for him in several respects: it once more made him aware of the constraints of his social background; it provided him with a topic for his first few novels; and, crucially, it made him reconsider his sexual allegiances once more, a move which culminated in his 1928 wedding to Bright Young Girl Evelyn Gardner.

Despite his frenetic partying, Waugh realized the shallowness and irresponsibility of the Bright Young People relatively early on. Wilson points out that 'Waugh envied others' irresponsibility, their utter indifference to anyone else's wants or needs. It

38 Waugh, *A Little Learning*, pp. 191–2; Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation*, p. 82, emphasis mine.

39 Evelyn Waugh, 'Letter to Nancy Mitford (18 December 1954)', in *The Letters of Nancy Mitford & Evelyn Waugh*, p. 357, emphasis mine.

40 Graham Greene, *A Sort of Life* (London, 1971), quoted in Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation*, p. 111.

41 Waugh, *A Little Learning*, p. 192.

42 Quoted in Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation*, p. 124; Evelyn Waugh, 'Letter to Dudley Carew (1924)', in *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, p. 12; Evelyn Waugh, 'Letter to Dudley Carew (1924)', in *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, p. 13.

was essentially aristocratic, alien to his own bourgeois origins. Waugh also felt that he had suffered from friends' lack of consideration, and his fiction shows that irresponsibility is often selfish, stupid, and harmful. It seemed to be an attribute of the younger generation, who had little interest in how to treat others'.[43] For somebody who came to admire good manners above everything else – in a 1953 interview for the BBC, Waugh's answer to the question of what irritated him most was 'bad manners' – his early association with the boisterous Bright Young People was an important experience.[44] In his 1956 essay 'Max Beerbohm', he openly criticized the behaviour of his friends, and ultimately of himself: 'Good manners were not much respected in the late twenties; not at any rate in the particular rowdy little set which I mainly frequented. They were regarded as the low tricks of the ingratiating underdog, of the climber. The test of a young man's worth was the insolence which he could carry off without mishap. Social outrages were the substance of our anecdotes.'[45] Waugh felt that underlying all that partying was a deep-rooted sense of ennui which he successfully reproduced in his novels. Carpenter compares the characters in Waugh's early fiction to 'inhabitants of the waste land', and the influence of Eliot's poem can be felt in several instances.[46] The title of Waugh's fourth novel, *A Handful of Dust*, was taken from a line in Eliot's *The Waste Land*: 'I will show you fear in a handful of dust.'[47] Waugh's early fiction reflected a world dominated by ever-changing trends. But as the 20s turned into the 30s, and especially after his wife Evelyn's infidelity, the ensuing divorce and, crucially, his conversion to Catholicism, Waugh began to turn his back on his trivial partygoing existence. He worried that the fragmentation celebrated in modernist novels (as, indeed, in his own early work) increasingly contradicted his personal quest for stability and continuity. His 1934 novel *A Handful of Dust* is different in tone, more serious, and, some claim, his 'first overtly apologetic work of fiction'.[48] In a 1962 interview with Julian Jebb, Waugh voiced the belief which dominated his later career: 'An artist must be a reactionary. He has to stand out against the tenor of his age and not go flopping along; he must offer some little opposition.'[49]

During the 1930s, Waugh's youthful 'limited Bolshevism' turned into right-wing mannerisms, and a condemnation of contemporary society which was, in his opinion, declining rapidly.[50] Once he had set up house as a country gentleman with his second wife Laura, his attacks against the decline of manners and morals became more vociferous. He was particularly outspoken against the Angry Young Men: for him, they were Hoopers-turned-writers who had risen through the ranks of state education, and who taught in the new red-brick universities which Waugh abhorred.

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43 Wilson, *Evelyn Waugh*, p. 67.

44 Stannard, *No Abiding City*, p. 337.

45 Evelyn Waugh, 'Max Beerbohm' (1956), in *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, pp. 517–8.

46 Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation*, p. 190.

47 T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (New York, 1988), line 30.

48 Stannard, *The Early Years*, p. 347.

49 Julian Jebb, 'Evelyn Waugh', in *Writers at Work* (London, 1968), 113, quoted in Stannard, *The Early Years*, p. 143.

50 Stannard, *The Early Years*, p. 55.

The antipathy was on both sides: for the younger generation of writers, Waugh personified everything they detested – just as Waugh before them had despised what his father's generation had stood for. Stannard writes that '[Kingsley] Amis hoped that few would wish to identify themselves with the neo-Jacobite, sexless Crouchback. Waugh, it seems, felt similar antipathy for Jim Dixon'.[51] Anthony Powell confirms this in his memoirs: 'Among those who never accommodated themselves to Amis's writing … was Evelyn Waugh. At the same time Waugh had a kind of obsession about "Little Kingsley", whose surname he always pronounced as Ames.'[52]

The heroes in Waugh's novels also changed, reflecting his conscious decision to belittle the working-class or lower middle-class heroes of Amis, Wain, Osborne and other 'Angries'. While his early work is dominated by middle-class heroes characterized by their innocence – Paul Pennyfeather, Adam Fenwick-Symes – his later work aspires to a higher class altogether. Tony Last takes Waugh's heroes into a higher social echelon, not quite aristocratic, but with all the outward trappings of a landed gentleman. Charles Ryder is a middle-class narrator who unashamedly admires the aristocratic Flytes. His hero eventually culminates in the upper-class, chivalric and Catholic figure of Guy Crouchback in the *Sword of Honour* trilogy. In his fiction, he celebrated what he saw in decline around him, and, in his later work, that is clearly the figure of the upper-class gentleman. Waugh is the only author discussed in this book who clearly associated gentlemanly values with the upper classes (out of which, after all, they had developed) rather than the middle classes. His ideal gentleman had his roots in the aristocratic figures of the eighteenth century – Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison or Steele and Addison's Sir Roger de Coverley. Guy Crouchback, at least, is clearly modelled on these eighteenth-century predecessors. In Waugh's work, especially his later novels, there is no trace of the nineteenth-century bourgeois, middle-class gentleman, who works his way up in society through hard work, modesty, piety and good deeds. Waugh's gentlemen are born and bred, not self-made and humble, and they know it.

Waugh used various means to depict the decline around him. One of his popular tropes is that of the country house, ever a mark of traditional Englishness. Showing the country house in decline is Waugh's way of expressing his pessimism with regard to the future of England. In his early novels, he expresses this through irony. In *Decline and Fall*, the society-belle, Margot Beste-Chatwynde, tears down King's Thursday and has it rebuilt by a modernist architect. Paul Pennyfeather, on his first visit to King's Thursday, has high hopes of a relaxing weekend in a traditional English country estate, but is cruelly disappointed by the modern chrome-and-glass construction.[53] Paul is an innocent naïf who is as yet blissfully unaware that modernization stops at nothing. The old estate-turned-ultra-modern villa should be a

51 Stannard, *No Abiding City*, pp. 365–6.

52 Anthony Powell, *To Keep the Ball Rolling: The Memoirs of Anthony Powell* (London, 1983), p. 413.

53 See *DAF*, p. 124 for Paul's expectations of a William Morris country idyll, and his rude awakening at first sight of King's Thursday.

warning to him that nothing will turn out as he expects: the house clearly fails to live up to his expectations, and so will its inhabitants.

Margot, unlike many members of the upper-classes at the time, has the financial means to rebuild her estate – although Waugh satirizes this by depicting her as a ruthless 'Madame'. In most of his later works, however, Waugh shows that the traditional landed families, who do not rely on a fleet of 'working girls' to supplement the family's coffers, can no longer keep up their houses. His opus is littered with crumbling or closed-down houses, and country estates without servants. David Cannadine remarks that:

> Before the 1870s, it was very rare indeed for country houses to be sold or demolished. … But gradually from the 1880s, and more markedly from the First World War … [m]any houses … were substantially reduced in size by partial demolition. … Others, who were selling out altogether, often disposed of the park and mansion at the sametime [sic]. … the sale of patrician mansions … became a flourishing business during the inter-war years. … From 1870 to 1919, some 79 mansions were destroyed in England, Wales, and Scotland. But between 1920 and 1939, the figure was 221.[54]

This trend worried Waugh. The sale or destruction of the aristocracy's ancient houses strengthened his belief that the approaching age of the Common Man was to be opposed at all cost. Like their real-life counterparts, Waugh's country-estate owners no longer had the financial means to keep the houses going. In *Vile Bodies*, Doubting Hall is 'falling down' and 'could do with a lick of paint', and when at last Adam Fenwick-Symes arrives at 'twin octagonal lodges and some heraldic gate-posts and large wrought iron gates, behind which could be seen a broad sweep of ill-kept drive', he finds the gates 'chained and locked' (*VB*, pp. 56–7), a sure sign of the social decline of its inhabitants, whose ancestral class always prided itself on keeping gates and doors open. The fact that Colonel Blunt is himself on door-duty is telling: he can no longer afford to replace ill or dead servants. Similarly, in *Scoop*, the park of Boot Magna turns slowly into a wilderness.[55] Lodge appropriately writes that 'the trees in the park reflect the state of the human inhabitants of the Hall, a family of ancient and noble lineage now enjoying neither modern comforts nor traditional dignity, its energy and resources almost entirely absorbed by the lavish maintenance of an army of aged and bedridden servants'.[56]

In *A Handful of Dust*, Hetton Abbey is a source of pride but also perpetual financial worry to its owner, Tony Last.[57] Tony is both captivated by – and captive to – the mediaeval atmosphere which enshrouds Hetton, where even the bedrooms are named after the chivalric heroes and heroines of mediaeval mythology. This clouds Tony's outlook on life. Having all his life slept in a room named after a gallant knight, he has fully absorbed – in a Foucaultian manner – chivalric notions and ideas.

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54 David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, revised edition (London, 1996), pp. 118–9.

55 See *S*, p. 17.

56 Lodge, *Evelyn Waugh*, pp. 7–8.

57 See *AHOD*, pp. 17–8.

Then there is Broome in the *Sword of Honour* trilogy, ancestral seat of the Crouchbacks, which has to be let out to a school, the furniture dispersed across the country.[58] Guy eventually settles back on the old estate – again, a Crouchback on the estate of Crouchback. The decay here is portrayed differently: in a reversal of fortunes, the family regains possession of the old estate, but with another man's 'bastard' as heir apparent to the title.

In 'An Englishman's Home', Waugh depicts yet another form of decline: the gentrified land-owners of Much Malcock are deceived by a pair of confidence tricksters, who announce their intention to build chemical research laboratories in the midst of their country houses, but withdraw their plans when the wealthy house-owners, after much internal squabbling, dole out the required cash in order to preserve their country idyll. The decline in this story is twofold: there is not only the obvious moral decline in the tricksters who resort to blackmail to make a living, but also that of the landowners themselves who, although desperate to preserve their arcadia, are at each other's throats about who ought to pay for it. The ultimate twist in the tale, however, is the fact that the two 'con men' resort to their fraudulent dealings only in order to keep up their own ancestral seat: the author here comes to the telling conclusion that 'a sterner age demanded more strenuous efforts for their preservation'.[59]

This is, of course, an ironic take on the situation, but the gist of Waugh's different depictions of country-house decline was very much in keeping with what he saw happening around him, and his short story can consequently be read as a critique of his fellow countrymen, who let their heritage go to rot. Land-owning families who did *not* want to sell out had to resort to drastic measures to ensure a continued cash flow. The sixth Marquess of Bath, for example, decided to open Longleat to the public in 1949. Cannadine writes that it was 'the first stately home to admit visitors on a regular basis. Within a year, 135,000 people had paid to come to look at Lord Bath's home and heirlooms, and, by the mid-fifties, the figure was topping a quarter of a million. Soon, Longleat was open every day … and Lord Bath was employing as large a staff as his ancestors had known in the nineteenth-century – albeit for different purposes'.[60] Others followed suit. Turning the houses into schools or hotels was another way out. The Marquess of Londonderry's sale advertisement suggested that 'if not required, the house is highly suitable for a hotel or school'.[61] Waugh mocked this new trend in his 1959 'Preface' to *Brideshead*: 'Brideshead today would be open to trippers, its treasures rearranged by expert hands' (*BR*, p. 8). Although the public interest in stately homes effectively saved them from decline, he could not approve of the fact that ancestral seats were opened to the Common Man. Many of his contemporaries showed a similar preoccupation with and concern for the decline around them. Nancy Mitford complained in 1956 that 'where his country house is concerned, the English nobleman, whose forebears were such lovers of beauty,

58 See *MAA*, p. 18.

59 Evelyn Waugh, 'An Englishman's Home' (1943), in *Work Suspended and Other Stories* (London, 2000), p. 61.

60 Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p. 646.

61 Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p. 118.

seems to have lost all aesthetic sense, and it is sad to see the havoc he often brings to his abode, both inside and out'.[62] She was appalled at seeing old houses modernized, torn down, or converted into amusement parks.

For many landed families, the situation was worsened by the appropriation of the big houses by the army during the war. The consequences of these enforced changes of inhabitants were usually disillusioning. As Waugh sees it, his contemporaries lacked respect for other people's property. In *Brideshead Revisited* and *Unconditional Surrender*, he equates appropriation by the army with the defiling of sacred sites. The army is described as a horde of uncouth animals, neither caring for nor looking after the riches of their new surroundings. In *Unconditional Surrender*, Ian Kilbannock sadly witnesses that 'the main building had been requisitioned and … was being eroded by soldiers' (*US*, p. 88); what generations of his family had held dear is being destroyed in the course of a few months. In *Brideshead*, Ryder wanders through the once familiar rooms, and is told that the last 'lot of soldiers' were 'very decent fellows. …They shouldn't have done that to the fireplace though. … I wonder if it can be mended. … It's got a lot of painting that can't be moved, done on the walls. … I've covered it up as best I can, but soldiers get through anything. … There was another painted room … and they made absolute hay of it' (*BR*, pp. 326–7). The paintings are the ones that Ryder himself had done; it was his attempt to celebrate the beauties of his surroundings, and also to put his own mark on the walls of Brideshead. The 'decent fellows' of the army are depicted as vandals who unthinkingly tear down and demolish Britain's heritage. Waugh's message is that the Common Man does not know how to behave in the hallowed ground of the country house.

Nostalgia for the bygone era of the great country houses is most potently symbolized by the boarded-up and fenced-in fountain at the end of *Brideshead Revisited*. It functions as a clear symbol of the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. Two contrasting world-views are perfectly poised here. A middle-aged Ryder arrives at the requisitioned Brideshead with the army. The chaos of the barracks leads him to reminisce about the Brideshead he used to know. The dirt and the disrespect for beauty in Charles's present are directly opposed to the beauty and elegance of his past.

Ryder shares his creator's admiration for old houses – and his nostalgia at their decline. He feels that it is an 'aesthetic education to live within those walls' (*BR*, p. 78). Aptly, he turns into an architectural painter, a chronicler of Old England. He owes his success to the decline of what he holds dear: 'The financial slump of the period … served to enhance my success, which was, indeed, itself a symptom of the decline. … After my first exhibition I was called to all parts of the country to make portraits of the houses that were soon to be deserted or debased; indeed, my arrival seemed often to be only a few paces ahead of the auctioneer's van …' (*BR*, p. 216). Ryder's paintbrush moves swiftly to eternalize on canvas what he fears will be lost for posterity.

For Waugh, the country house functioned as a metaphor for value in society: the moral value of its inhabitants, wealth of history, admiration of the arts and of

62 Nancy Mitford, 'The English Aristocracy', in Mitford (et al.), *Noblesse Oblige*, p. 55.

all things beautiful. The country house in Waugh's novels, threatened by dereliction or modernization, represents Waugh's threatened world. It is not only the country house, the symbol of England's glorious past, that is being endangered by the Age of the Common Man, but all of England herself.

In order to understand the marked shift in Waugh's literary style, as well as his changing depiction of the English gentleman, it is necessary to consider his understanding of human character. The young Waugh believed that people were either static or dynamic, a concept he took from the philosophical writing of Bergson. Bergson believed in a life-drive [*élan de vie*], dominated by things dynamic as opposed to things static.[63] Waugh applied this theorem to the conception of his characters. He created static, unchanging characters, often good, intelligent, and in many cases his protagonists, such as Paul Pennyfeather or Tony Last. These were opposed by the more proactive, dynamic, and inevitably more entertaining figures, often small-time crooks or confidence tricksters – for example Captain Grimes, or Philbrick in *Decline and Fall*. The crucial development in Waugh's work was his change of preference. In his early work Waugh was 'on the side of the life force. … he is backing the eccentrics, the confidence tricksters, the manipulators'.[64] In his later fiction, however, Waugh celebrated the static character, whose goodness was impervious to the onslaught of The Common Man. Waugh's idea of the gentleman was dynamic, in that it kept changing throughout much of his career. In his first novel, his depiction of a proper English gentleman in the figure of Paul Pennyfeather pales in comparison to the roguish characters peopling the novel. In his later novels, however, he warns of the dangers of the dynamic characters, and punishes them in favour of the (unchanging) 'good men'. In *A Handful of Dust*, Tony Last, for example, is pictured as a bore. Waugh's aim, however, is to establish the readers' sympathy with Tony, by depicting his adversary John Beaver as less witty than Grimes in the earlier novel, and as an obnoxious character whose upward mobility causes problems for the people he associates with. In *Sword of Honour*, he finally presents us with the celebration of the static hero *par excellence*, Guy Crouchback, whose role in the Second World War is not so much to fight the *German* enemy as to fight the enemy in the shape of the dynamic new man.

Decline and Fall, like *A Dance to the Music of Time*, starts with a fashion faux pas, which immediately labels the hero as not belonging to the smart set reigning at his Oxford College. Paul Pennyfeather's tie resembles that of the Bollinger Club, but the slight difference in stripes is one that the inebriated Bollingers take as an affront.[65] The Bollinger Club is a society of aristocratic and upper-class hearties,

63 Like Waugh, Bergson was strongly attracted to Catholicism and can be considered a potential convert. He was Jewish, and noted in his will in 1937 that he would have converted to Catholicism if it had not been for the persecution of Jews and his wish to show solidarity with them. However, after his death, friends claimed that he had secretly been baptized after all (see Leszek Kolakowski, *Bergson* [Oxford, 1985]. See also Stannard, *The Early Years*, pp. 166ff for more details).

64 Stannard, *The Early Years*, p. 169.

65 See *DAF*, p. 12.

infamous for the destruction they wreak. Paul is a not very well-to-do middle-class student 'reading for the Church' (*DAF*, p. 11), who is depicted as a swot and a bore – characteristics which set him apart from the rowdy Bollinger set. For the social outrage of wearing a tie with stripes a quarter of an inch wide, the Bollingers forcefully deprive Paul of his trousers, and make him 'run the whole length of the quadrangle … *without his trousers*' (*DAF*, p. 13). This episode costs him both his place at university and his annual allowance, and clearly shows the arbitrariness of a system where the rich and influential are punished merely with a nominal fine, while the poorer are expelled with a nonchalant 'it's quite alright. … It's Pennyfeather – someone of no importance' (*DAF*, p. 13).

These words set the tone for the novel: Paul is constantly pushed around. His name already indicates this: a penny is not worth much, and a feather is almost weightless. Nevertheless, he is the one person who at least attempts to give voice to gentlemanly values. However, the fact that the author himself is clearly on the side of the very people attacking Paul's attempts at gentlemanliness undermines his role in the novel even further.

Mock-gentlemanliness plays a major part in the novel. Waugh presents us with a diverse cast of characters, all of them striving to be, or at least to *appear* to be gentlemen. Apart from the innocent Paul, there is Grimes, the public-school man and teacher, whose life is dedicated to the maxim that a public-school man can do no wrong; there is the butler Philbrick who, chameleon-like, assumes one role after another, servant one minute, would-be millionaire the next. The novel is peopled with bizarre characters who all follow varying codes of gentlemanly behaviour, which Waugh uses to subvert the ideal of the gentleman: for example, the headmaster Dr. Fagan's desperate attempts to employ somebody with '*tone*'; Grimes, who is appalled at the social affront of having to share the village pub with Philbrick, the school butler; and, of course, Philbrick himself, who complains to Paul that 'I wasn't made to be anyone's servant' (*DAF*, pp. 19; 27; 51). There is also Dr. Fagan's rage at finding a boy secretly smoking in the boiler room; it is not the fact of smoking which so enrages Fagan, but the fact that the culprit had been smoking *cheap yellow* cigars – '*not* a gentlemanly fault' (*DAF*, p. 36). Finally, there is Dr. Fagan's helpless dismay at being confronted with the prospect of obtaining Grimes as a son-in-law: 'He is *not* the son-in-law I should readily have chosen. I could have forgiven him his wooden leg, his slavish poverty, his moral turpitude, and his abominable features; I could even have forgiven him his incredible vocabulary, if only he had been a *gentleman*' (*DAF*, p. 96). Fagan's criteria for gentlemanliness seem confused. Grimes's list of crimes is, after all, long; he has neither morals nor manners, uses bad language, disgraces the army and seduces his pupils. But Fagan's outrage is compromised by his own moral shortcomings, which consist mainly of a total disregard of the professional ethics of a headmaster. These attitudes are contrasted with Paul's reaction to the offer of financial recompense for his expulsion from Oxford. He muses about his honour, and comes to the conclusion that:

> for generations the British bourgeoisie have spoken of themselves as gentlemen, and by that they have meant, among other things, a self-respecting scorn of irregular perquisites. It is the quality that distinguishes the gentleman from both the artist and the aristocrat.

> Now I am a gentleman. I can't help it: it's born in me. I just can't take that money. (*DAF*, p. 44)

Paul places himself in the nineteenth-century middle-class tradition of the gentleman, and distances himself from the disgraceful behaviour of the aristocracy, which had precipitated his downfall in the first place. However, Waugh mocks this attitude, not only by making Paul conveniently forget his principles when Grimes accepts the money on his behalf, but also by being secretly relieved at having overcome the obstacle of his 'honourable' upbringing. Waugh points an ironic finger at middle-class pretentiousness, and, pointedly, at the hypocrisy of its alleged values, which crumble at the sight of a pound note.

Waugh's first novel can be read as a vitriolic attack against the aristocracy. The members of the Bollinger Club indulge in debauchery: '*epileptic* royalty from their villas of exile; *uncouth* peers from *crumbling country seats*; smooth young *men of uncertain tastes* from embassies and legations; *illiterate* lairds from *wet granite hovels* in the Highlands; *ambitious* young barristers and Conservative candidates torn from the London season and the indelicate advances of debutantes' (*DAF*, p. 9; emphases mine). The picture Waugh paints of the aristocracy is one of immorality and decrepitude. Aristocrats are depicted as uneducated, graceless, sexually ambiguous, and as considering university merely for its entertainment value. Bogaards writes that 'before they catch Paul and remove his trousers they have demolished one student's grand piano, thrown a Matisse into the lavatory, smashed china and torn sheets, actions at an extreme remove from the good breeding, education and manners expected of a gentleman'.[66] Waugh depicts them as representatives of a society that has lost all sense of direction and value. With the description of Margot Beste-Chadwynde and her son Peter, later Lord Pastmaster, he also shows their snobbishness: for them, Paul is a mere foil, a convenient scapegoat for their own crimes. They fully expect him to go to prison in Margot's stead because, in Peter's words, 'you can't imagine Mamma in prison, can you?' (*DAF*, p. 161). Paul *might* believe himself to be doing the honourable thing; but he is not shielding a weak female. He allows the upper classes to take advantage of him, and get away with, metaphorically speaking, murder.

Waugh's attitude towards the aristocracy changes considerably in his later work, which turns from critique to adulation; and at the same time, Waugh's depiction of the gentleman changes. In *A Handful of Dust*, we meet Tony Last, Esquire, the perfect country gentleman. He adores his family, cherishes his estate and takes his duties seriously. Tony is clearly what a gentleman ought to be. Nevertheless, he is variously described in the novel as 'rather a stick' and 'a prig' (*AHOD*, p. 9), is left by his wife, and eventually ends up lost in the jungle. Tony's surname, *Last*, is an interesting choice on Waugh's part. It can be read as an expression of rebellion: as a static character, Tony deserves no happier ending. But it could also be interpreted as the opposite, Waugh's first elegy to a dying breed. Bergonzi confirms that in Tony Last we can see 'the first outlines of the English Gothic dream, the cult of the

66 Bogaards, 'Evelyn Waugh's England': 130.

aristocracy and the country house'.[67] This interpretation can be supported by Waugh's choice of ending for the novel: Tony is stranded in the jungle without any hope of return to Hetton. This is opposed by an alternative ending, in which Tony returns to England: he is reunited with his wife, who has been abandoned by her lover, and secretly decides to keep her London love-nest, possibly for his own similar use. That Tony might keep a secret flat in London would have accorded with the prevailing hypocrisy in a society where it was considered almost the norm that a well-to-do upper-class husband would keep a secret second establishment, away from his wife and family. But Waugh did not share this view; it clashed with his new, increasingly religious outlook on life, which also began to colour his idea of the gentleman.

A different approach to the gentleman can be found in *Black Mischief* and *Put Out More Flags*. Basil Seal wants to be 'one of those people one heard about in 1919; the hard-faced men who did well out of the war' (*POMF*, p. 46). He represents the still dominant version of masculinity: the manly man, the adventurer who actively seeks thrills and pleasure. In direct contrast to him, Waugh presents us with the effeminate aesthete Ambrose Silk. Basil and Ambrose can be seen to represent the two warring factions of masculinity within Waugh. But Ambrose is eventually betrayed by Basil and this points towards the direction of Waugh's later fiction.

After his expulsion from Oxford, Paul Pennyfeather is employed as a teacher at Llanaba Castle. The public school is an institution closely linked to the idea of the gentleman: it has always been considered a 'forge' for gentlemen. Regardless, Waugh mocks it mercilessly – down to the stinging remark that 'anyone who has ever been to an English public school will always feel comparatively at home in prison' (*DAF*, p. 188). This echoes his own, predominantly negative experiences as a teacher at various public schools. Llanaba Castle, although a school of only minor repute, nevertheless places the greatest possible emphasis on something its Headmaster refers to as *tone*, in a pathetic bid to to hide the school's shortcomings. *Tone* is mentioned several times in Paul's interview with Dr. Fagan, and this directly echoes Waugh's own interview experiences for his first teaching post at a minor public school in Wales: 'The only question he asked was whether I possessed a dinner-jacket. When the parents of Irish boys came to visit them, such a garment was required. Reassured on that point he engaged me … .'[68] Waugh's real-life headmaster, just like his fictional Dr. Fagan, does not require a teacher with credentials or *real tone* (read here as correct gentlemanly behaviour, with matching manners, morals, and conceptions of honour). What *is* required is a man who looks and acts *as if* he had tone; not a *real* gentleman, but somebody who merely *looks* the part.

In keeping with the school's emphasis on *tone*, the hapless pupils at Llanaba Castle learn little of academic value, but are instilled with notions of class and gentlemanliness – though again this happens not in any traditional sense. Paul's fellow teacher Prendy informs him on arrival that their colleague Grimes 'is not a gentleman'; a pupil, Peter Beste-Chatwynde, has him marked down as 'so common', and Dr. Fagan confides that 'I shall have to get rid of Grimes. … He is *not* out of the top drawer, and boys notice these things' (*DAF*, pp. 23; 26; 19).

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67 Bergonzi, 'Evelyn Waugh's Gentlemen': 23.

68 Waugh, *A Little Learning*, p. 216. See also *DAF*, pp. 18–9.

In the figure of Grimes, Waugh viciously lampoons the idea of the gentleman, the institution of the public school, and hypocrisy within society. Grimes considers himself a gentleman – 'Well, I'm a gentleman too, old boy' – but his faults of 'temperament and sex', and his propensity to 'land in the soup' (*DAF*, pp. 45; 28) seem to disqualify him from that title from the outset. But Grimes knows about hypocrisy within society, and he knows how to work this in his favour. Expelled from his own school as a teenager, he has ever since cherished a letter of recommendation from his Housemaster which taught him that 'the public school system … may kick you out, but … never let[s] you down' (*DAF*, p. 28). The public school, supposed to make gentlemen out of boys, is presented as an institution which promotes whoever passes through its gates, regardless of worthiness. There is considerable irony in Waugh's take on the public school, which might also be construed as bitterness and envy. At the time of writing *Decline and Fall*, Waugh had to cope with the social snubs of Lady Burghclere, and felt more insecure than ever in his social position. He must have felt that he would have had a stronger claim on her good will if he had attended a more prestigious school. The attack on the public-school system in *Decline and Fall* might be interpreted as simply revenge on his part. But whatever his motivation, Waugh's take on the public school is perceptive in pointing to real shortcomings of the system: it is not personal merit that counts, but the name of the school attended. In *Decline and Fall*, Grimes's life is full of anecdotes which tell of how being a public-school man rescued him from tricky situations. Even during the First World War, when gentlemanly values were still writ large, he is rescued from an impending court-martial by a fellow Old Boy. Waugh's irony highlights the hypocrisy of society, where the old boys network has more influence than is its due. Grimes, who, at public school, ought to have learnt how to behave as a gentleman, has obviously not; in place of gentlemanly values such as honesty and humility, he has learnt cunning. Instead of doing the honourable thing so as not to embarrass his battalion, he gets drunk and laughs at his fellow soldiers. The major who sends him off to his 'cushy job' is equally to blame: a fellow 'old boy' takes precedence over the honour of the battalion (*DAF*, p. 29). This, and for once favourably, recalls Powell's Widmerpool, who famously remarked that 'for a man to have shared one's education is, in my eyes, no special recommendation to my good graces' (*CCR*, p. 366).

The question of gentlemanliness reaches its climax when Paul, shortly before his marriage to Margot, is arrested in her stead for white slaving, and sentenced to seven years imprisonment. Time in prison makes him think – and especially rethink – his social conceptions:

> He had "done the right thing" in shielding the woman: so much was clear, but Margot had not quite filled the place assigned to her, for in this case she was grossly culpable, and he was shielding her, not from misfortune nor injustice, but from the consequences of her crimes; he felt a flush about his knees as Boy Scout honour whispered that Margot had got him into a row and ought jolly well to own up and face the music. ... [H]e had wrestled with this argument without achieving any satisfactory result except a growing conviction that there was something radically inapplicable about this whole code of ready-made honour that is the still small voice, trained to command, of the Englishman all the world over. (*DAF*, p. 187)

Paul realizes that the notions instilled in him from boyhood are not easily applied in real life. He is tiring of chivalrously being the scapegoat for others, realizing that there is no sense in chivalry if no one else is being chivalrous. But Paul's class-consciousness runs deep: 'On the other hand was the undeniable cogency of Peter Beste-Chatwynde's "You can't see Mamma in prison, can you?" The more Paul considered this, the more he perceived it to be the statement of a natural law. … As he studied Margot's photograph … he was strengthened in his belief that there was, in fact, and should be, one law for her and another for himself, and that the raw little exertions of nineteenth-century Radicals were essentially base and trivial and misdirected' (*DAF*, pp. 187–8). This is a direct attack on nineteenth-century middle-class reformers, who fought to extend middle-class rights against the upper classes. The nineteenth-century Reform Acts not only extended the right to vote, but also cleaned up the process of voting altogether, which resulted in a loss of upper-class privileges. Full democracy, however, was a contentious issue; Roberts points out that it was 'supported only by political radicals'.[69] Waugh's idea of the gentleman was aristocratic, and derived mainly from the eighteenth century. Nineteenth-century middle-class movements for greater equality between the classes were abhorrent to him.

This subject preoccupied Waugh, and he was torn in his attitude towards it: he was class-conscious, in that he was unhappy with his own middle-class background and frustrated at the failure of his attempts to join the upper classes. But at no time did he aim at a classless society. He was a vociferous defender of the very class distinction which paradoxically kept him away from the upper classes. In an article of 1959, he bemoans the decline of the class system: 'with our class-system we are fast losing all national character. It was thought absurd by many and detestable by some, but it was unique and it depended for its strength and humour and achievements on variety: … There were different vocabularies and intonations of speech; different styles of dress. Now all those things … are being dissolved'.[70] In his prison cell, Paul Pennyfeather ponders those class issues. If taken at face value, this passage indicates his belief in a class-system which separates people such as himself and Margot. However, on a more subversive level, one might interpret this class barrier as a blessing in disguise, protecting innocents such as Paul from becoming too embroiled with the Beste-Chadwynde set. The same two-way interpretation is possible for Peter, Lord Pastmaster's later comment: '"I think that it was a mistake you ever got mixed up with us; don't you? We're different somehow. Don't quite know how. Don't think that's rude, do you, Paul?"' (*DAF*, p. 215). This comment proves Peter's snobbishness, but Paul does not consider it rude, because it helps him recognize that it is safer for him *not* to associate with the Metroland set.

In *Decline and Fall*, Waugh presents us with a playful deconstruction and subversion of the idea of the gentleman, which works on different levels. He presents us with the gentleman as a bungling naïf who is pushed around by more dynamic

69 Adam C. Roberts, *Victorian Culture and Society: The Essential Glossary* (London, 2003), p. 186.

70 Evelyn Waugh, 'I See Nothing But Boredom … Everywhere (1959)', in Evelyn Waugh, *A Little Order: Selected Journalism*, ed. Donat Gallagher (London, 2000), pp. 46–7.

characters. He also points his finger at the hypocrisy of a society which judges people merely by the clothes they wear, by the *tone* they adopt and by the school they have attended. He presents us with a gentleman figure in the person of Paul Pennyfeather, whose gentlemanly values are shown to be hollow when he accepts what is, effectively, a bribe from Alastair Digby-Vane-Trumpington. Paul's further attempts to keep up this gentlemanly façade by shielding his fiancée from prison are undermined, not only by his own doubts concerning these values, but also by the fact that he becomes an accomplice to Margot's morally deprived social set, by allowing them to liberate him from prison and set him up with a new identity.

But with the ending – Paul returning to his old life, reading divinity at Scone – Waugh problematizes his very subversion. Paul's return to the quiet life at Oxford can ultimately be interpreted as suggesting that the author embraces gentlemanly values after all, preferring them to the morally dubious life of the *beau monde*.

The tone of the gentlemanly debate is different in Waugh's transitional novel *Brideshead Revisited*: it completed the development in his novels from anarchic to apologetic, it depicted his shift from the youthful dandy-rebel criticizing his elders' values, to tweedy, Christian, country gentleman, and his own Catholicism came to the fore. The narrator, Charles Ryder, can be seen as Waugh's alter ego: his admiration of Brideshead, his adulation of the aristocratic Flytes and his wish to please them, are indicative of Waugh's own feelings towards the aristocracy, and his own dream to join their ranks.

In his 1959 Preface to *Brideshead*, Waugh admitted to nostalgia at the time of writing the novel: 'It seemed then that the ancestral seats which were our chief national artistic achievement were doomed to decay and spoliation …' (*BR*, p. 8). During the war, he became convinced of the destructive influences of the new age around him: the fear of a coming Socialist state; the hated coalition with the Soviet Union; the Americanization of Britain. To Diana Cooper he wrote in 1942: 'Perhaps in the future … when Senator Cooper is representing the State of Free England in Washington and I am teaching English syntax to a convent school in Quebec, we may meet at Niagara. Meanwhile I live in the past.'[71] He increasingly sought refuge in an *imaginary* past which led Toynbee to describe him as a 'mourner for a world that never was'.[72]

The social changes worrying Waugh included the growing austerity of wartime England, which continued well into the 1950s. Waugh later apologized for the gluttony in *Brideshead*: 'It was a bleak period of present privation and threatening disaster – the period of soya beans and Basic English – and in consequence the book is infused with a kind of gluttony, for food and wine, for the splendours of the recent past, and for rhetorical and ornamental language, which now with a full stomach I find distasteful' (*BR*, p. 7).[73] Waugh enjoyed the good life too much to find the culinary

71 Evelyn Waugh, 'Letter to Diana Cooper (February 1942)', quoted in Stannard, *No Abiding City*, p. 1.

72 Philip Toynbee, quoted in Stannard, *No Abiding City*, p. 95.

73 Waugh's depiction of Oxford differs radically from that in Larkin's *Jill*, published only a year after *Brideshead.* In the introduction, Larkin explains the austere environment of

splendours in *Brideshead* really distasteful. If anything they have to be considered crucial to his presentation of 1920s Oxford, and of the estate of Brideshead as an Arcadian *Schlaraffenland*, a land of milk and honey where the rivers run with wine, and where the Flyte family dazzle all with their effortless superiority.

Despite its changed tone, *Brideshead* is still occasionally interspersed with traces of the rebellious younger Waugh, the Waugh influenced by Oxford's zestful dandy-aesthetes. This is apparent most particularly in his depiction of the homoerotic friendship between Charles Ryder and Sebastian Flyte.

Charles Ryder is not one of Waugh's most successful characters. He is wooden and stiff, and easily manipulated by stronger characters; Bergonzi calls him 'one of Mr. Waugh's least interesting characters: weak, sentimental, snobbish'.[74] He pales into insignificance next to the beautiful and charming Sebastian. This demonstrates the class difference between the two: Ryder is the drab middle-class character emulating the beauty and style of the aristocratic Sebastian. Ryder openly admits to dating 'my Oxford life from my first meeting with Sebastian' (BR, p. 26). Interestingly, this date is given as 1923, which was also the year Waugh himself first met Harold Acton. Acton and his flamboyant set – comprising, among others, the equally dazzling Brian Howard – adopted Waugh into their 'fashionable and extravagant life, the exotic aesthetic tastes and the anarchic playfulness'.[75] The year 1923 was consequently a pivotal one for the young Waugh. His friendship with Acton liberated him from his own sexual uncertainties. Stannard writes that '[Acton] at last … combined the panache of Roxburgh and the aestheticism of Crease; an aggressive, charming, rigorous intellect and a fervent dedication to the arts'.[76] Acton was hugely influential on Waugh's early work – the dedication of Decline and Fall 'To HAROLD ACTON in Homage and Affection' demonstrates this – and there are marked similarities between Acton's life and instances in Waugh's early novels.[77] He was so influential at Oxford that he even set the trend for a revival of Victorian style and fashion. In his memoirs, Acton remembers that 'I bought a grey bowler, wore a stock and let my side-whiskers flourish. Instead of the wasp-waisted suits with pagoda shoulders and tight trousers affected by the dandies, I wore jackets with broad lapels and broad pleated trousers. The latter got broader and broader. Eventually they were imitated elsewhere, and were generally referred to as "Oxford bags"'.[78] This shows again the importance of fashion for individual depictions of manhood.

In Acton's set, homosexuality was openly acknowledged, and intense male friendships were deemed the norm. Alan Pryce-Jones recalls that 'it was *chic* to be

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Oxford in the 1940s, and elaborates that 'This was not the Oxford of Michael Fane and his fine bindings, or Charles Ryder and his plovers' eggs' (Philip Larkin, *Jill* [London, 1964], p. 12).

74 Bergonzi, 'Evelyn Waugh's Gentlemen': 30.

75 Green, *Children of the Sun*, p. 214.

76 Stannard, *The Early Years*, p. 80.

77 Acton – like Paul Pennyfeather and Anthony Blanche – was often attacked by Oxford hearties; his rooms served as a model for Sebastian's; he – like Blanche – enjoyed reciting poetry through a megaphone. See, for example, Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation*, pp. 42; 72.

78 Harold Acton, quoted in Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation*, p. 41.

queer'.[79] One of the places where young men could openly live out their homoerotic fantasies was the Hypocrites Club which achieved notoriety for its rowdy, drunken revels. It was inevitably closed by the college authorities. Powell describes the club in his memoirs as 'two or three rooms over a bicycle-shop … at the end of St. Aldate's … a vicinity looked on as somewhat outside the accepted boundaries of Oxford social life. … transmogrification had gone a long way, though still short of the metamorphosis … into a fashionably snobbish undergraduate haunt; before final closure by the authorities … in effect for rackety goings-on'.[80] Waugh in his memoirs describes the club as 'notorious not only for drunkenness but for flamboyance of dress and manner which was in some cases patently homosexual'.[81]

In *Brideshead Revisited*, Waugh does not mention the Hypocrites Club; nor is homosexuality a subject openly broached. However, a strong sense of, at least, homoeroticism is apparent, and this can best be summed up by Emily Eells's aptly phrased term *Anglosexuality*, the 'fus[ion] and confus[ion] [of] the eroticism and aestheticization of same-sex desire'.[82] This aestheticization can be seen in *Brideshead*: the celebration of beauty takes centre stage. For Ryder, Sebastian personifies style and beauty, and he readily models himself on him. He writes about the beginning of their friendship that 'I knew Sebastian by sight long before I met him. … he was the most conspicuous man of his year by reason of his beauty, which was arresting, and his eccentricities of behaviour, which seemed to know no bounds' (*BR*, p. 30). This not only marks Sebastian as one of Green's *Sonnenkinder*, but also links him to Powell's Stringham, with whom he shares many similarities. His beauty, and the ways he emphasizes it, through dress, mannerisms and eccentric behaviour (for example the teddy bear), also label him as a dandy – and as such a member of a peer group similar to Waugh's own at Oxford. In fact, Sebastian's mannerisms are drawn from a number of Waugh's contemporaries at University. John Betjeman, for example, always carried a teddy-bear known as 'Archie (full name Archibald Ormsby-Gore)'.[83] Most of Waugh's friends at Oxford shared an unconventional, if not eccentric dress sense, of which Acton's Oxford Bags were just one expression. Betjeman was renowned for idiosyncratic clothes; Waugh insisted on hand-made clothes of the best materials.[84] They not only admired the dandies of an earlier generation, but were dandies themselves, and, as such, celebrated the individuality of their different styles. Within their circle, Widmerpool's wrong kind of overcoat might not have stood out. The dandyism of 1920s Oxford was still linked to class

79 Alan Pryce-Jones, *Bonus*, p. 49 in Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation*, p. 81.

80 Anthony Powell, *To Keep the Ball Rolling: The Memoirs of Anthony Powell. Volume One: Infants of the Spring* (London, 1976), p. 154. Powell's memoirs also contain two photographs of parties at the Hypocrites, one of them picturing Harold Acton sporting an army cap and heavy, mask-like make-up. The photos show that the overall tone at the club was over-the-top-effeminate, most of the men being in drag.

81 Waugh, *A Little Learning*, p. 179.

82 Emily Eells, *Proust's Cup of Tea: Homoeroticism and Victorian Culture* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 7.

83 Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation*, p. 101.

84 See Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation*, p. 101; and Stannard, *The Early Years*, p. 91, for more details.

and wealth. Bristow explains that the 'dandy's identity … still occupied a special place in the upper echelons of Society'.[85] *Brideshead* emphasizes this point: Ryder is taken in at first sight by Sebastian's beauty, his clothes, his extravagant room, all so very different from his own bourgeois background.

The homoerotic undertone of the novel is strengthened by the marked exclusion of women from the Oxford section. A misogynist attitude is visible when women are allowed into the hallowed halls of the College. In Ryder's words, it is a 'rabble of womankind' descending on them, 'twittering and fluttering', clearly 'intruders' (*BR*, p. 23) who have no right to enter the world of male bonding. The close relationship between Ryder and Sebastian is only hinted at: they wear each other's clothes, and keep each other company while taking baths.[86] Charles enjoys watching Sebastian – '[my eyes were] on his profile' – or expanding on his 'epicene beauty which in extreme youth sings aloud for love and withers at the first cold wind' (*BR*, pp. 26; 33). There are also the incidents when they are discovered together in Sebastian's rooms one night 'after the gate was shut', which hints at the possibility of each spending nights in the other's room, or when two prostitutes label them as 'only fairies' (*BR*, pp. 120; 111). The one very strong suggestion that more than friendship exists between the two can be seen in Ryder's admission that 'that summer term['s] … naughtiness [was] high in the catalogue of grave sins' (*BR*, p. 46) which is reminiscent of Waugh's own confession, previously cited, that 'St. John has been eating wild honey in the wilderness'.[87] Lord Marchmain's mistress Cara speculates on the special relationship between the two young men, when she says that 'I know of these romantic friendships of the English and the Germans. They are not Latin. … It is a kind of love that comes to children before they know its meaning. In England it comes when you are almost men' (*BR*, p. 98). This again ties in with Eells's perceptions of *Anglosexuality* as a 'form of sex and sensuality'.[88]

Scores of critics have speculated about the precise nature of Ryder's and Sebastian's relationship.[89] Although *Brideshead* appears to be a reworking of his own Oxford experiences, Waugh, by being so evasive about their friendship, clearly did not dare make a public stand in favour of homosexuality. But the homoerotic element is not the crux of the story. Ryder's infatuation with Sebastian proves to be not sexual infatuation with an individual, but rather social infatuation with a glamorous representative of an admired class. Sebastian serves as Ryder's entrance ticket into a higher social sphere.

Ryder and Sebastian rebel against society and its preconceived notions of behaviour – of which their different ways of decorating their rooms or their

85 Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885* (Buckingham, 1995), p. 37.

86 See *BR*, pp. 24; 121.

87 See footnote 42.

88 Eells, *Proust's Cup of Tea*, p. 7.

89 See for example: David Bittner, 'Sebastian and Charles ─ More than Friends?' *Evelyn Waugh Newsletter and Studies* 24/2 (Autumn 1990): 1–3; David Leon Higdon, 'Gay Sebastian and Cheerful Charles: Homoeroticism in Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*', *ARIEL* 25/4 (October 1994): 77–89; and Tison Pugh, 'Romantic Friendship, Homosexuality, and Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*', *English Language Notes* 38/4 (2001): 64–72.

idiosyncratic clothing are merely outward manifestations. They reject uniformity of manner and appearance and, as such, form a counter-discourse to the accepted codes of gentlemanliness. They prefer each other's company. Ryder explains that '[w]e kept very much to our own company that term, each so much bound up in the other that we did not look elsewhere … ' and that 'I had no mind then for anything except Sebastian' (*BR*, pp. 103; 123). Their friendship is intense and exclusive. Again, this could of course be read as evidence of the homoerotic nature of their relationship. But Ryder's fixation on Sebastian can also be interpreted as his concerted effort to cut himself off from his past (middle-class) friends. Sebastian, on the other hand, has found in Charles someone new who is removed from his own background and its accompanying pressures. They both reject intrusions from the outside world, in Ryder's case in the form of his patronizing cousin Jasper, in Sebastian's case in shape of his family. Crucially, Sebastian seeks refuge in childhood memories, and can be seen as a Peter Pan figure. He freely admits to this: '"if it could only be like this always – always summer, always alone, the fruit always ripe, and Aloysius in a good temper … "' (*BR*, p. 77). Waugh himself occasionally regressed into childhood, for example enjoying the 'childhood games' provided by the army.[90] His novels reflect this: in *Put Out More Flags*, Alastair Digby-Vane-Trumpington is full of excitement about his new special army unit which sounds like a little boy's dream come true: '"They have special knives and tommy-guns and knuckle-dusters; they wear rope-soled shoes. … They carry rope ladders round their waists and files sewn in the seams of their coats to escape with"' (*POMF*, p. 217). In *A Handful of Dust*, Tony Last still sleeps in his childhood bedroom, a veritable museum to childhood. For Guy Crouchback in *The Sword of Honour* trilogy, the lines '"Gentlemen … tomorrow you meet the men you will lead in battle"' fondly 'set swinging all the chimes of his boyhood reading' (*MAA*, p. 165). During his first few weeks in the Halberdiers he 'had been experiencing something he had missed in boyhood, a happy adolescence' (*MAA*, p. 47). In *Brideshead*, Ryder ponders that '[t]here is no candour in a story of early manhood which leaves out of account the home-sickness for nursery morality …' (*BR*, p. 61). Many of Waugh's contemporaries shared this attitude of not wanting to grow up, probably best summed up by one of the most prominent Bright Young Things, Diana Mitford, later Mosley: 'How should we manage to keep alive when we were grown up?'[91] Cyril Connolly expounded on this 'theory of permanent adolescence', believing that 'the experiences at great public schools are so intense as to dominate the lives and arrest the development of those who undergo them'.[92] Refusing to grow up was pure escapism for a bewildered generation which had seen its elder brothers slain on the battle fields of the Somme and which looked with dread to an uncertain future. Waugh's novels symbolize the disintegration of society, and the figure of the perpetual adolescent is one representation of a society trying to close its eyes to the future and just live for the present. The quotation from Connolly perfectly encapsulates the attitude of many of Waugh's male characters:

90 See Stannard, *No Abiding City*, p. 124.

91 Diana Mosley, *A Life of Contrasts* (London, 2002), p. 46–7.

92 Both quotations from Cyril Connolly, 'A Georgian Boyhood', citted in Green, *Children of the Sun*, p. 164.

Tony and his childhood room, Guy and his resort into Captain Truslove's fictional world, and Sebastian, who feels happiest when he visits his old nanny. The examples in Waugh's work are numerous.[93] All these 'men who have not grown up' paint an interesting and rather questionable picture of Waugh's notions of gentlemanliness – a gentlemanliness tainted by *The Boy's Own Paper* and by unrealistic dreams of adventures and heroism.

In *Brideshead*, notions of gentlemanliness are clearly marked by a class divide. If we recall Waugh's 'Open Letter' to Nancy Mitford, we will remember that he had described how '*everyone draws the line of demarcation immediately below his own heels*'.[94] This, at least, is the case with Ryder. Uncomfortable with his middle-class background, he orientates himself upwards, and snubs whoever is below him. For him, Platoon-Commander Hooper epitomizes the 'symbol … of Young England' (*BR*, p. 15), the Common Man, who has worked his way up through the ranks. He describes Hooper without sympathy, as a 'sallow youth with hair combed back and a flat, Midland accent' (*BR*, p. 13). The regional accent immediately labels him as lower class, as does, in Ryder's (and Waugh's) eyes, his inability to keep himself presentable according to army regulations.[95]

For Ryder, inspiration can be found only in the upper classes, especially after his enchanting pre-war experience with the Flyte family. A year after the first publication of *Brideshead*, Waugh confirmed his own enchantment with the upper classes in his aptly placed *Town and Country* article 'What to do with the Upper Classes', in which he not only defends the aristocracy as 'the sole, finished product of … English culture', but also warns of the danger of extinction threatening the upper, landed classes in England.[96] Waugh's article is a call for a return to old-fashioned values. He deals with it lightly and ironically when he suggests keeping the aristocracy mainly as a tourist attraction, but his underlying fear manifests itself when he suggests segregating them in a 'casbah quarter, walled in and well guarded … comprising most of St. James's and Belgravia'.[97] Waugh's notion of an aristocratic utopia was fuelled by his dystopian visions of the new age – segregation of the aristocracy might

93 To name but two more examples, there are Bridey Flyte with his matchbox collection, and Brigadier Ritchie-Hook with his boyish pleasure at 'biffing', not even to mention his little-thought-through adventurous excursions onto enemy territory. Anthony Powell echoes a similar attitude to arrested development in *A Dance to the Music of Time*, with his depiction of Erridge, Lord Warminster, and his secret stash of *The Boys Own Paper*.

94 Waugh, 'Open Letter', p. 74.

95 Ryder's superior, for example, points out that Hooper's 'hair wants cutting', and echoes Ryder's own exasperation with regard to the new, lower-class officers with a 'My God, the officers they send us now!' (*BR*, p. 14).

96 Evelyn Waugh, 'What to do with the Upper Classes: A Modest Proposal (1946)', in *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, p. 313. In this article, he praises the upper classes for having created the English landscape, formed speech, directed developments in the arts, and built up the Empire and justice system. Interestingly enough, Waugh once again also talks about his hobby-horse, 'honour', when he claims that it was the upper classes who 'created and preserved our conceptions of … honour' (p. 313).

97 Waugh, 'What to do with the Upper Classes', p. 316.

be the last, desperate measure to protect them from the infiltration of the Common People.

In his relationship with Sebastian, Ryder is the inferior partner, not only because he subjugates his own wishes to Sebastian's every whim, but also, and principally, because he considers himself Sebastian's social inferior. Raphael writes that 'Charles's passion for Sebastian's world has, of course, its element of entranced curiosity: his lover gives him the *entrée* to a family whose embrace he craves and from whom – with neat irony – Sebastian dreams only of liberation'.[98] That is the *crux* of the novel: Charles seeks entry *into*, Sebastian an escape route *from* his family. As such, *Brideshead Revisited* depicts Charles as a social climber who uses every available means – first Sebastian, then Julia, then religion – to find entrance to and acceptance within Brideshead. It is when the outside world, in the form of Sebastian's family, intrudes into their idyll that Ryder and Sebastian's intense friendship starts showing cracks. Ryder grows to love what Sebastian loathes: Brideshead and all it stands for enchants Ryder, while it traps Sebastian.

Their relationship is doomed because Sebastian, who comes from within the charmed circle, does not share Ryder's unquestioning adulation of the upper classes. Ryder, on the other hand, cannot understand Sebastian's desire to leave all that behind. The boisterous striving for individuality which had charmed Ryder at Oxford no longer makes sense when opposed to what he perceives as the arcadia of Brideshead. He quickly exchanges his counter-discourse of gentlemanliness with a more moderated outlook on things. He wants to conform to what he admires in the Flytes; Sebastian wants to escape from it. The idea of gentlemanliness in *Brideshead Revisited* is consequently one of simultaneous aspiration and rejection.

Ryder's efforts to emulate the Flytes, and ultimately to attain an aristocratic gentlemanliness, culminate in his conversion to Catholicism. This, however, occurs outside the narrative. As readers, we are confronted with a newly converted narrator. It is an unconvincing and unsatisfying part of the novel. *Brideshead Revisited* is Waugh's transition towards the depiction of the aristocratic *and* Catholic gentleman, and the belief that true gentlemanliness can come hand-in-hand only with spirituality. However, Ryder's conversion smacks too much of a last-ditch attempt to join the Flytes, if not on a material, than at least on a spiritual level; he is not only the literal hanger-on in their house, but also in their church. His conversion and his attempt at spiritual gentlemanliness also fails to convince because of his uncharitable attitude towards anyone below him, exemplified by his behaviour towards Hooper and the lower ranks. He is debarred from his ultimate aim – to be considered an upper-class, Christian, chivalric gentleman – by his own snobbishness. Ryder represents the conflict raging within Waugh. He could not reconcile his *ideas* of gentlemanly behaviour with an actual *execution* of them. He knew that he himself often behaved in an uncharitable way, and struggled hard – but unsuccessfully – to overcome this obstacle.

Sebastian, in contrast, is undoubtedly Waugh's most enduring character. As a gentlemanly figure, Sebastian stands out from the crowd of Waugh's other male figures, because he swims against the stream of gentlemanly perceptions. Like

98 Raphael, 'Revisiting Brideshead': 29.

Powell's Stringham, Sebastian is shown to go against society's expectations only to reach a personal final wisdom. He, too, stands in awe of his influential mother, drops out of Oxford, meanders through life without much purpose, and eventually seeks solace in alcohol.[99] In Sebastian's case, the final, purposeful attitude is hard for outsiders to comprehend: he *seems* to be squandering his life away in North Africa. But it is there that Sebastian finds his true calling, first in looking after the German Kurt, then in the monastery.

Sebastian's salvation lies in turning his back on society – an attitude which first manifests itself in his retreat into childhood, which he tries to recreate with visits to his old nanny and nursery, and with his generally immature behaviour at Oxford. His father's mistress Cara realizes this: '"Sebastian is in love with his own childhood. That will make him very unhappy. His teddy-bear, his nanny ... and he is nineteen years old"' (*BR*, p. 100). His later alcoholism is yet another attempt at escape; an escape which finally culminates in his retreat into the Tunisian monastery, and which is foreshadowed early on by his remark 'I shall go on running away, as far and as fast as I can' (*BR*, p. 130).

In North Africa, Sebastian's health deteriorates because he keeps drinking, but his general frame of mind improves because he has found a responsibility in looking after a fellow drunk. He is happy in his new-found role as carer and home-maker; for the first time in his life, he feels needed.[100] The Tunisian monastery, finally, offers Sebastian a nursery replacement. He feels looked after but not pressurized, and he has also found a simple proximity to his religion which comes without social obligations. Additionally, he has returned to the security of an all-male society, which makes him feel both free and protected.

It is interesting to speculate who or what could have inspired Waugh to create a character such as Sebastian. One formative figure, admired by his generation, was T.E. Lawrence, yet another representative of the *Sonnenkind*. Green writes that 'Lawrence of Arabia was the other great figure of the *Sonnenkind* in public life. … When he came back to England in 1919 he was believed to have refused the crown of Arabia. … But his glamour was due to his style as well as to his achievement'.[101] Lawrence united in his person what Waugh strove for both in himself and in his characters: he was a celebrated man of action, but at the same time an aesthete. Dawson points out that he offered 'the spectacle of that most masculine of men, the soldier, elaborately arrayed in flowing skirts, in transgression of gender fixities'.[102]

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99 For a detailed comparison of Sebastian and Stringham, see my 'Two Lost Souls: Powell's Charles Stringham and Waugh's Sebastian Flyte – A Comparison', in George Lilley, Stephen Holden and Keith Marshall (eds.), *Anthony Powell and the Oxford of the 1920s* (Greenford, 2004), pp. 214–26.

100 See *BR*, p. 207, where Sebastian confides in Charles about the new-found purpose in his life.

101 Green, *Children of the Sun*, pp. 73–4.

102 Graham Dawson, 'The Blond Bedouin: Lawrence of Arabia, Imperial Adventure and the Imagining of English-British Masculinity', in Michael Roper and John Tosh (eds), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London, 1991), p. 113. Dawson's speculation about Lawrence's 'transgression of gender fixities' hints at recently established claims concerning Lawrence's homosexual leanings during his time at Oxford, and his close

He was also deeply religious. Above all, he was always considered the perfect gentleman.

Lawrence was highly adept at fashioning his image for increased effect. His biography states that '[i]t is possible to distinguish two Lawrences, one a historic figure and the other a creature of mythology. The separation of the two is difficult, not least because Lawrence was, in part, the creator of his own myth …'.[103] Lawrence's special attire, for example, served several functions. Leaving aside their advantages of comfort over the standard British uniform, his clothes were chosen to impress and to awe. Under a picture of Lawrence in 'the white robes of a sharif with golden-hilted dagger', his biographer explains that this 'costume … immediately suggested to the Arabs that he was a man of wealth and authority'.[104] To his British compatriots, it would have evoked his distinctive 'otherness', setting him apart, and promulgating his myth.

Lawrence's asceticism, influenced by his deep religiousness, was yet another way of enhancing the personal myth surrounding him, and it might have prompted Waugh's creation of Sebastian. Lawrence's brother wrote after his death that 'his subjugation of the body was achieved by methods advocated by the saints whose lives he had read'.[105] Lawrence shunned easy options, often actively seeking out discomfort, excruciating marches, bad weather or food and sleep deprivation.[106] His asceticism was supported by his quest for solitude and meditation. 'Go into the desert for a few years, and you will return a prophet', he told a friend.[107] The idea of 'monastic withdrawal' was important to Lawrence, and he found it in the most unlikely places.[108] It was also an idea which came to fascinate Waugh. Stannard writes that '[i]ts solitude and silence, its concern for craftsmanship and discipline, above all, its regime of continuous spiritual reflection, offered a model for a way of life immured from the cacophonous modern world in timeless, masculine routine'.[109] It is this idea of withdrawal into an ascetic and, quite literally, monastic life which links Lawrence to Waugh's description of Sebastian Flyte. Sebastian's 'holiness' (*BR*, pp. 293–4), as Cordelia points out to Ryder, is linked to his new ascetic existence in the monastery, which encourages a simple life, and can be seen as Sebastian's retreat into the desert in order to return as a prophet.

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friendship with Vyvyan Richards. See, for example, Lawrence James, *The Golden Warrior: The Life and Legend of Lawrence of Arabia* (London, 1995), p. 35.

103 James, *The Golden Warrior*, p. xvi.

104 James, *The Golden Warrior*, picture inset between pp. 172–3.

105 M.D. Allen, *The Medievalism of Lawrence of Arabia* (University Park, PA, 1991), p. 170.

106 See Allen, *The Medievalism of Lawrence of Arabia*, pp. 172–3.

107 Allen, *The Medievalism of Lawrence of Arabia*, p. 176.

108 He told his friend Robert Graves that 'joining the world of men … employed [in tending machinery] was a modern form of monastic withdrawal' (James, *The Golden Warrior*, p. 411). This 'world of men' also pointedly excluded women.

109 Stannard, *No Abiding City*, p. 63. At a Waugh-Centenary-Conference in Oxford in September 2003, one delegate pointed out in response to my paper on Waugh, Powell and Lawrence that Waugh was also intrigued by one particular book advertising the monastic life, Patrick Leigh Fermor's *A Time to Keep Silence*.

The simple life in the monastery is a conscious rejection on Sebastian's part of the easy life he led in England. As a member of an aristocratic family, he could have enjoyed luxury – even, had he so chosen, abroad, away from the scrutiny of society. His health might have improved, had he been looked after by the best doctors his family's money could buy for him. But his rejection of all that, and his conscious subjection to poor living conditions, show his willingness to transcend the limits of a weak body, in order to find spiritual enlightenment.[110]

The theme of the English gentleman in Waugh's work finally reaches its climax in *The Sword of Honour* trilogy. Bernard Bergonzi explains that

> In the person of Guy Crouchback Waugh offers us his fullest and most sympathetic delineation of the ideal of the Gentleman, the embodiment of the Gothic dream, a gallant officer who would be, if he could, a twentieth-century reincarnation of Roger of Waybroke. The trilogy shows us first his disillusionment and then the total defeat of his ideal by the inescapable forces of modern war.[111]

Sword of Honour is the culmination of Waugh's life-work and, as such, deeply coloured by his own experiences and personal disillusionment during the war. Crouchback's war is Waugh's own: the idea of fighting for a gallant cause, which fades into frustration and then utter disillusion; fear of a changing world and a social hierarchy in upheaval; a further retreat into a mythical Christian chivalry, derided by others. The titles of the three individual instalments of the novel are telling: *Men at Arms* conveys the general sense of purpose at the onset of war: all soldiers united in their fight against evil. *Officers and Gentlemen* already opposes the sense of harmony suggested by the previous title. The final instalment – *Unconditional*

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110 There are also striking similarities between Lawrence's life and Powell's character Stringham, which again reinforce the general similarities between Stringham and Sebastian. In addition to his personal asceticism, Lawrence also went down in rank to join the RAF in 1923, where he became known as 'Gentleman Ranker' (James, *The Golden Warrior*, p. 409). He explained his motivation with '"You can see better at the bottom of the ladder than at the top"' (James, *The Golden Warrior*, p. 411), but his friends linked Lawrence's decision to serve as a private to a larger nationwide movement, which saw many upper-middle-class people taking on work for or within the Labour party, in order to liaise with ordinary people. *A Dance to the Music of Time* echoes Lawrence's experiences as 'gentleman ranker', when Stringham enters the army as a private. His ill health might have exempted him from active service. Equally, his social rank should have entitled him to a more responsible position. For Stringham, the war offers an opportunity to do something towards the common good. A rigorously regimented army life helps him not only to combat the dissipation of his earlier life, but also to leave society behind, and concentrate on a specific task. In all likelihood, Stringham's death in the prisoner-of-war camp is hastened by the effects of physical exertion on a body weakened by years of alcohol abuse. That was, however, a risk he entered into willingly. In that respect, Stringham's ascetism is similar to Sebastian's, in that both ignore the demands of a weak body in order to gain spiritual freedom.

111 Bergonzi, 'Evelyn Waugh's Gentlemen': 34.

Surrender – instead of celebrating victory in war, expresses merely a sense of utter defeat.[112]

When the Second World War began, Waugh joined the Marines, whose sense of 'Pomp and Circumstance' impressed him. Stannard describes Waugh's first days at Chatham Barracks, where 'the buildings were superb; the mess rewarded discipline with gastronomic luxury. A tradition of ceremonious life structured every waking moment and, for a few weeks, the conflicting aspects of his personality were fused. Silver candelabra stood reflected in heavy, polished mahogany, the port slid clockwise, and Waugh felt contented'.[113] This experience is echoed in *Men at Arms*, and in Guy's first impressions of the Halberdiers: 'The officers of the Royal Corps of Halberdiers … lived in great comfort' (*MAA*, p. 43). Waugh himself felt that '[i]n the Marines … he had found the courtesy and taste of the *eighteenth*-century gentleman surviving among its regular officers'.[114] The emphasis on *eighteenth* again underlines the fact that Waugh's image of the gentleman harked back to the time when it was still a predominantly aristocratic ideal. Crucially, joining the Marines, with their emphasis on ceremonial even in battle, gave Waugh the feeling that he could finally 'be both aesthete and man of action'.[115] This again is echoed in the novel's Royal Corps of Halberdiers.

At the onset of the war, the reader is presented with a picture of Guy Crouchback in his Italian home, praying at the tomb of a mediaeval knight-crusader for his 'endangered kingdom', which has to face battle with 'the Modern Age in arms' (*MAA*, pp. 13; 12). Guy thus romantically links himself to mediaeval knights, and at heart considers himself a chivalrous knight in shining armour. He sees the war as his chance to fight the Modern Age, and to help to re-invigorate traditional notions of gentlemanliness. Guy's pledge, made at Sir Roger's tomb, is to fight against the modern 'unbelievers', in the shape of both fascism and communism. His total

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112 This title recalls the previously mentioned novel by Angela Thirkell, with its equally defeatist title, *Peace Breaks Out*. This attitude was shared by many of Waugh's contemporaries. Nigel Nicolson, for example, recalled the fear of the war, and of its aftermaths with regard to their social position, felt by his parents, Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson: 'they both believed that the world which they knew and loved would be irreparably broken by the war. They saw it as the end of *les douceurs de la vie*. … They thought that their past life of literature, Bloomsbury, "the purchase of books and pictures and the unthinking enjoyment of food and wine", a large garden and sufficient servants, was now an "obsolete tradition." They feared the permanence of the new vulgarity which the war had introduced. "I have always been on the side of the underdog", wrote Harold Nicolson, "but I have also believed in the principle of aristocracy. I have hated the rich, but I have loved learning, scholarship, intelligence and the humanities. Suddenly I am faced with the fact that all these lovely things are supposed to be 'class privileges'"' (Nigel Nicolson, quoted in Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* [Oxford, 1989], p. 45) . Nicolson adds that his parents' fears proved unfounded, which ties in with Waugh's later refutation of his fear for stately homes in the 1959 'Preface' to *Brideshead*. Nevertheless, their attitude shows a shared worry among many members of the upper class.

113 Stannard, *No Abiding City*, p. 1

114 Stannard, *The Early Years*, p. 503, emphasis mine.

115 Stannard, *No Abiding City*, p. 1.

disillusion during the war comes with the British-Soviet alliance when, in his view, his own country betrayed all traditional values.

From the outset, Guy is presented as a lonely crusader for old-fashioned values. Although he wants to be part of the Halberdiers and acquire a sense of belonging to his new regiment, he is happiest on his own. It is not only his more advanced age which sets him apart; it is predominantly his own sense of being different. This feeling increases during the course of the war. In the end, Guy is the survivor, the one honourable man who has tried to uphold his own values throughout the war, but has had to realize that they no longer matter to those around him.

There are countless examples of gentlemanliness in the trilogy, most of them of the wistful, backward-looking, nostalgic kind. Guy Crouchback embodies them all, as does his father – for Guy, the 'best man, the only entirely good man, he had ever known' (*US*, p. 65). Old Mr. Crouchback lives a simple but happy life in two rented rooms in a seaside hotel. His life is dominated by quiet worship in his local church, and by doing good deeds with what little financial means remain to him. Waugh cunningly uses Mr. Crouchback's greedy landlords, Mr and Mrs Cuthbert, to demonstrate differences of class and breeding. They are scheming to oust him from the hotel, but Mr Crouchback never once suspects foul play. His friend Miss Vavasour's reprimands are telling: '"You are too trustful, Mr. Crouchback. You treat everyone as if he were a gentleman"' (*OAG*, p. 24). Mr Crouchback believes in the Christian notion that people treat you as you treat them. He also thinks that everybody shares his own values. The Cuthberts clearly do not. They think only of lining their own pockets, and even spy on their guests. Evidence for this can be found in their dialogue after Mr Crouchback has offered them the use of his living room: '"Maybe he's feeling the pinch." "Not him. He's worth more than you'd think. Why, he gives it away, right and left. I know because I've done his room sometimes. Letters of thanks from all over the shop"' (*OAG*, p. 38). Waugh cunningly uses irony to reveal the not only ungentlemanly, but wholly immoral behaviour of the Cuthberts, who do not think twice about reading their guests' correspondence and going through their personal belongings. With this attitude, Waugh labels the Cuthberts as representatives of the despised Common Man, who lacks common-sense morals and, crucially, decency.

Guy's chivalric notions of war are challenged more than once. Many of his friends do not share his ideals. There is, for example, the symptomatic exchange between Guy and Ian Kilbannock, during which Kilbannock accuses Guy and the Halberdiers of being out of touch with the modern times:

> … your racket, Guy … just won't do, you know. Delightful fellows, heroes too … but the Wrong Period. Last-war stuff, Guy. Went out with Rupert Brooke. … Hopelessly upper class. You're the "Fine Flower of the Nation". You can't deny it and *it won't do*. … This is a People's War … and the People won't have poetry and they won't have flowers. Flowers stink. The upper classes are on their secret list. We want heroes of the people, to or for the people, by, with and from the people. (*MAA*, p. 101)

Kilbannock's attitude is in keeping with the changing times, especially his references to the People's War. He understands that his times require action rather than ceremonial. Interestingly, Kilbannock is upper-class himself. He laments some of

the changes the war has brought – such as the previously mentioned slow destruction of his requisitioned family seat. Despite this, he recognizes and accepts the changes, and understands that there will be no going back in the future. In Waugh's eyes, that attitude marks him as a traitor to his own class.

Guy's military career is undistinguished, and this has to do mainly with the fact that he, too, is a static character. He does not show enough self-initiative for promotion in an army which is all about 'elbow-power'. His gentlemanly reticence inhibits him from putting himself in the limelight. In this, his attitude differs drastically from most of his fellow officers. The most prominent – but also most entertaining – example of the pushy type of officer is Apthorpe who, with his ingratiating manners, his reluctance to share information with other people and his permanent fear of being judged in the wrong way, can be seen as the *Sword of Honour*'s Widmerpool.

Guy's main problem during the war is that his conception of warfare is founded on boyhood reading and on chivalric notions, which have nothing in common with a modern total war: 'Troy, Agincourt and Zululand were more real to Guy … than the world of mud and wire and gas …' (*MAA*, p. 166). His relationship with the men in the platoon under his command is equally tainted by romantic images, and he pictures himself as a second Sir Philip Sidney giving away his last drop of water.[116] Disappointment with the reality of war is inevitable.

Despite the increasing seriousness of tone, there are still glimpses of the dandy-aesthetes in the novel. Crucially, however, in the *Sword of Honour* trilogy Waugh once and for all does away with the figure of the dandy-aesthete, liberating himself from the ghosts of his past, as he had come to see them. His handling of the character of Ivor Claire is indicative of this:

> a Captain of the Blues who reclined upon a sofa, his head enveloped in a turban of lint, his feet shod in narrow velvet slippers embroidered in gold thread with his monogram. He was nursing a white Pekinese; beside him stood a glass of white liqueur. … The pictorial effect was of a young prince of the Near-East in his grand divan in the early years of the century. (*OAG*, p. 48)

Reading those lines calls to mind images of Harold Acton or Brian Howard. Guy is enthralled by Claire's physical beauty, and the element of homoeroticism is again evident. The favourable introduction of the aesthete-turned-warrior Claire jars heavily with the first introduction of the 'new man', Halberdier Trimmer, whose introduction does not bode well:

> His large, long-lashed, close-set eyes had a knowing look. Trimmer concealed under his cap a lock of golden hair which fell over his forehead when he was bare-headed. He spoke with a slightly refined Cockney accent and when the wireless in the billiards-room played jazz, Trimmer trucked about with raised hands in little shuffling dance steps. Nothing was known of his civilian antecedents; theatrical, possibly, Guy supposed. He was no fool but his talents were not soldierly. The corporate self-esteem of the Halberdiers did not impress Trimmer, nor did the solemn comforts of the mess attract him. (*MAA*, p. 46)

116 See *MAA*, p. 173.

The tone is set immediately, and, almost inevitably, Trimmer turns out to be no good. Even though he has long lashes, which might have made him handsome, his eyes are described as too close-set, a sign of bad character; they are also 'knowing', which might mean 'cunning'; the fact that he conceals his hair indicates that he is not honest – heaven knows what else he is hiding, and not only under his cap. His 'slightly refined Cockney accent' marks him as the worst of all possible social evils (at least in Waugh's eyes): the lower-class social climber with ambition who even takes trouble to refine his speech. He does not divulge his past; in Guy's eyes, a 'theatrical' background seems to be equal to 'low-life', and not quite an honest profession – after all, aren't actors skilled at impersonating what they are not? And, the worst crime of all: he is not impressed with the 'Pomp and Circumstance' of the Halberdiers, who are so close to Guy's own heart. Trimmer is the *Sword of Honour*'s Hooper, the Common Man who has somehow managed to worm his way into exalted circles. But with Trimmer Waugh shows the extent to which this particular Common Man has infiltrated the higher ranks of society: Trimmer has an affair with Guy's wife Virginia which results in a pregnancy. Virginia dies in an air raid, and Guy is, literally, left holding the baby – bringing up the 'Common Man's bastard' as his own son and heir. This is how far the unconditional surrender of the gentleman has advanced by the end of Waugh's trilogy.

During the course of writing *Officers and Gentlemen*, Waugh came to a radical decision. The dandy-aesthete-turned-soldier Claire, and with him Waugh's past friendship with dandies and aesthetes, as well as his own homosexual leanings, all are laid to rest once and for all. He does this in the most decisive way possible, by turning Claire into a deserter. The path to honour proves too steep for him. Influential friends whisk him away to relative safety in Burma, where he redeems himself in battle, but not so in Guy's eyes: for him, the admired Claire has betrayed one of the most important gentlemanly characteristics – honour – and he ceases to exist.[117]

Waugh wrote *Officers and Gentlemen* in 1955. It is possible to draw a direct parallel between the desertion of Waugh's dandiacal Ivor Claire and the treason committed by three other dandy-aesthetes: the infamous Cambridge spies Burgess, Maclean and Philby, who fled to Moscow on 25 May 1951.[118] Claire is depicted as having a similar social support system of admirers (Mrs Stich) as the three spies.[119] The case of the Cambridge Spies had deep repercussions on British society. They had been considered epitomes of the English gentleman, with picture-book careers from Eton, through Cambridge, to the higher reaches of the British diplomatic and secret service. Their betrayal of their country showed the cracks appearing in the Establishment of old Etonian and Oxbridge gentlemen who were running Britain.

117 See *OAG*, pp. 238–9 for Guy's condemnation of Claire as 'an illusion'.

118 It was only Burgess and Maclean who fled to Moscow on that day; Philby followed in 1963, after having previously been cleared of all charges in connection with the two spies. See Green, *Children of the Sun*, pp. 427–34 for more details.

119 See Green, *Children of the Sun*, p. 431 for details on Burgess, Maclean and Philby's sympathizers, who tried to hush up the scandal when it first came to light. In Waugh's novel, Mrs Stich is depicted not only as organizing Claire's escape to safety, but also as pulling strings to have Guy recalled to London, in order to keep him quiet regarding Claire's desertion.

In a haunting manner it was brought home to the country that not everyone who *appeared* to be a gentleman necessarily had to *be* one. Burgess, Maclean and Philby, flamboyant, glamorous characters like Claire, had used their charm and their high connections to obtain classified information, and to betray their country to the Soviets, the ultimate representatives of the Modern Age so feared by Waugh. In *Officers and Gentlemen*, Waugh ousted the glamorous *Sonnenkind* representative of the gentleman in favour of the more deserving, reliable, traditional gentleman, in the person of Guy Crouchback.

The case of Ivor Claire also gave Waugh an opportunity to expound the changing history of honour. Shortly before his desertion, Claire ponders the meaning of the word:

> "I was thinking about honour. It's a thing that changes, doesn't it? I mean, a hundred and fifty years ago we would have had to fight if challenged. Now we'd laugh. There must have been a time a hundred years or so ago when it was rather an awkward question. … And in the next war, when we are completely democratic, I expect it will be quite honourable for officers to leave their men behind. It'll be laid down in the King's Regulations as their duty – to keep a *cadre* going to train new men. …" "Perhaps men wouldn't take kindly to being trained by deserters." "Don't you think that in a really modern army they'd respect them the more for being fly? I reckon our trouble is that we're at the awkward stage – like a man challenged to a duel a hundred years ago." … Ivor stood up saying: "Well, the path of honour lies up the hill," and he strolled away. (*OAG*, pp. 220–1)

The 'path of honour' proves too steep an uphill climb for Ivor Claire. The man who, in Guy's eyes, 'was the fine flower of them all. …quintessential England, the man Hitler had not taken into account' (*OAG*, p. 114), runs away. The two men's discussion of honour is an interesting one. Claire thinks that in the modern age it might eventually be cowardice which will be celebrated, not steadfastness and honour. His attempt to couple honour with cowardice, two not at all complimentary terms, is intriguing. He tries to make the new age work for himself, and turn its distinct disadvantages of confused values to his own advantage. It is in this attitude that he differs from Guy, who still holds honour in high esteem.

The crucial point is that it is not actually honour which changes. Rather, it is people's perception of it which undergoes change. In the eighteenth century, men would still have challenged each other to duels in order to prove their sense of honour, whereas the nineteenth century introduced different means to do the same thing. A modern-day lawsuit, we might argue, can effectively be entered upon for the same purpose as a duel: to re-establish the plaintiff's honour. The above-quoted dialogue does not indicate that Waugh would welcome a return to the days of the duel. But his traditional hero Guy displays impeccable behaviour throughout the war, in keeping with his honour both as an officer and as a gentleman. But in this, Guy is alone. Many of the other officers around him falter, and society is shown to condone dishonourable behaviour. This highlights the decreasing importance of honour as an essential requirement for gentlemanliness.[120]

120 Ian Kilbannock's attitude is indicative of this, when he declares, two years after Claire's desertion, that 'Everyone is [fond of Ivor] and everyone has forgotten his little *faux*

Waugh often considered questions of honour during the war. He was aware of a possible conflict of interest which might lead to different interpretations of the same term. In a 1940 letter to Laura, he pondered that 'one goes into a war for reasons of honour & soon finds oneself called on to do very dishonourable things'.[121] This reflects the quandary in which Waugh found himself when Britain allied herself with her former enemy, Russia: one starts fighting for honourable reasons, is then asked to do something dishonourable, and, once that was done successfully, one would again be celebrated for having done honourable deeds. It was a contradiction he found unacceptable.

It is precisely in this context of honour that the double meaning of the title *Officers and Gentlemen* may be expanded. At one level, the title indicates that officers are automatically gentlemen. During the Great War, it was still predominantly young gentlemen of good families who obtained commissions, whereas during the Second World War, men of socially less exalted background might also rise through the ranks. Bearing this in mind, one cannot help but consider that Waugh rather intended the '*and*' in the title as a divider: in his eyes, there were officers, and there were gentlemen, and the two were not necessarily united in one person. The depiction of the individual officers in his novel supports this interpretation. Ivor Claire's shortcomings have already been expanded on. But other officers fare no better: Corporal-Major Ludovic, for example, is a shady character, possibly embroiled in murder. Most important, though, is Major Hound who compromises his gentlemanliness by putting hunger before honour. In his case, Waugh uses an extended 'dog' metaphor which begins with the name 'Fido' Hound to voice his social disapproval: Major Hound grovels like a dog for something to eat, which, incidentally, resembles dog food; he is depicted as 'scratching and snuffling', as 'pawing', and as following 'tiny, delicious doggy perceptions' (*OAG*, pp. 177; 188; 189; 202). A man without honour, Waugh seems to imply, is indeed no better than a dog. Fido eventually deserts and finds a gruesome end. His fall is observed by the impeccable Guy, who suffers the same deprivation, but resists temptation and survives, his honour untainted.

The romantic sacrifice, of which Guy has dreamt for so long, eventually comes in an unexpected form which affects his honour and tests his resolve. By remarrying his ex-wife Virginia, and agreeing to become father to the child she conceived by Trimmer, the representative of the new age, he comes closest to his chivalric and, crucially, Christian notions. Kerstie Kilbannock, who fears that gentlemanly Guy has been taken in, tries to warn him. Guy's response, that he marries Virginia *because of* the pregnancy, shocks her:

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pas in Crete' (*US*, p. 127). This statement raises two problems: Claire's desertion is belittled as a *faux pas* – described in the dictionary as 'an embarrassing blunder' (*The Oxford Paperback Dictionary*, Second Edition). Clearly, deserting in the face of the enemy is more than a mere 'blunder'. In fact, during the Second World War, desertion was still considered an offence that could result in a court martial. And it is this fact that once again gives rise to class speculations: Ivor Claire is a popular, upper-class character, who, crucially, has very influential friends who can not only help him to get away from danger in the first place, but also aid his subsequent reintegration into society.

121 Evelyn Waugh, 'Letter to Laura Waugh (28 September 1940)', in *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, p. 141.

> "You poor bloody fool … you're being *chivalrous* – about *Virginia*. Can't you understand that men aren't chivalrous any more and I don't believe they ever were. … Can't you see how ridiculous you will look playing the knight errant? Ian thinks you are insane, literally. Can you tell me any sane reason for doing this thing?" … "Knights errant", he said, "used to go out looking for noble deeds. I don't think I have ever in my life done a single, positively unselfish action. … Here was something most unwelcome, put into my hands; something … 'beyond the call of duty;' not the normal behaviour of an officer and gentleman; something they'll laugh about in Bellamy's" (*US*, pp. 150–1).

Guy believes that by rescuing Virginia he fulfils his duty as a Christian gentleman, and also his dream of knight-errantry. He does not love Virginia, nor does he relish the notion of having to raise Trimmer's child. Karl writes that 'in remarrying Virginia … he is reversing all conventional ideas of individual and family honour'.[122] Guy now understands that honour is not a static concept, but a dynamic one, applied differently in different situations. He distinguishes between his family honour and his honour as a Christian, and places the latter first. Guy realizes that the Crouchback lineage, so cherished by his late father, will be contaminated by bringing Trimmer's 'bastard' into the family. Nevertheless, he sees it as his duty to help Virginia. His 'because of' in the conversation with Kerstie Kilbannock is indicative of his new-found conviction: 'His chivalric quest is directed no longer towards adventure, comradeship, and victory: it is now a lonely mission of self-sacrifice. Not the easy sacrifice of his own life in battle, but the sacrifice of his personal honour and the pure lineage of which his father was so proud.'[123] Four years of total war have taught Guy that his own integrity as a Christian gentleman is more important than acceptance by others. However, the differentiation into various kinds of honour is also important. It shows not only that different people can have diverse conceptions of the term, but also that one individual can distinguish between separate situations which require a different kind of honour.

From his biography, we know that Waugh spent much of the war re-reading Victorian novels.[124] His reading matter indicates a wholehearted turn towards the very Victorian values he and his cohort of bright young socialites had once ridiculed. The *Sword of Honour* trilogy openly and nostalgically celebrates old-fashioned ideals. Waugh laments not only the demise of a world order, but also in particular the slow suffocation of the gentleman by his contemporary society. Its hero is a relic from a past time, and Corporal-Major Ludovic's comment 'All gentlemen are now very old' (*OAG*, p. 186) sums him up perfectly. It is only the older men who still show some conception of gentlemanly values. The younger men have all been tainted by the 'New Age'. Gone is the anarchic frivolity of Waugh's early novels. What remains is the author's deep dissatisfaction with a new age which has left him and his values behind.

The three works discussed in this section – *Decline and Fall*, *Brideshead Revisited* and the *Sword of Honour* trilogy – all mark stages in Waugh's development

122 Karl, *A Reader's Guide*, p. 453.

123 Karl, *A Reader's Guide*, p. 454.

124 See Stannard, *No Abiding City*, pp. 53; 143.

as a writer. But there is one final matter which might problematize Waugh's attitude towards the gentleman: his own behaviour. Waugh's relentless attempts to establish himself higher up the social ladder did not necessarily endear him to the higher-class friends he sought to entertain and emulate all his life.[125] The propensity to anarchy, which so entertainingly coloured his early writing, often found unfortunate expression in his own manners: he was even expelled from the notoriously rowdy Hypocrites Club for 'having smashed up a good deal of the Club's furniture with the heavy stick he always carried'.[126]

Waugh's social insecurities were responsible for his preoccupation with the idea of the gentleman. It was through linking himself to people above him that he thought of securing the title for himself. In 1952, he wrote to Nancy Mitford that the ideal of the gentleman 'explains all our national greatness 1815–1914 – that everyone felt his natural allies to be those above him (and in his eyes equal) in Social Scale'.[127] Outsiders and friends alike laughed at his social aspirations; but often they attacked Waugh's right to call himself a gentleman, and these attacks wreaked havoc on his volatile self-esteem. Terence Greenidge, for example, commented that 'Waugh had been "born a gentleman" but had "ceased to be one"'.[128] Duff Cooper, husband of Waugh's close friend Lady Diana, considered Waugh a 'bumptious *parvenu*', and abused him to his face as 'a common little man'.[129] Wilson recalls a telling incident which highlights how sensitive Waugh felt about the issue of his own gentlemanliness: 'In 1944, Waugh was elected to membership in the Beefsteak Club. … He once ordered the doorman out into pouring rain to call a taxi. The doorman shouted, "A taxi for Mr. Waugh, what isn't a gentleman!" Waugh insisted that the doorman should be sacked, but the club stood by their man, and Waugh resigned.'[130] Waugh's (over)reaction to the incident highlights his insecurity. One cannot help but feel that any other man would have laughed the incident off. But Waugh considered occurrences like that to be a general conspiracy against him, and even felt that his friends were involved in it. By 1952, for example, he had finally managed to get an entry into *Burke's Landed Gentry*, but in the next edition this entry

125 In his journals, Powell, next to a picture of Waugh in his typical country-gentleman outfit of three-piece tweeds, commented that 'Evelyn Waugh "never made any bones about wanting to advance himself socially"' (Anthony Powell, *Journals 1982–1986* [London, 1995], second photo inset between pages 210–11). See also Carpenter, *The Brideshead Generation*, p. 90: 'When [Connolly] asked Waugh why he made such a row so often, he received the candid reply: "Because I'm poor." Waugh had realized that the Etonians would accept him … if he made them laugh.'

126 Powell, *Infants of the Spring*, p. 154.

127 Evelyn Waugh, 'Letter to Nancy Mitford (14 January 1952)', in *The Letters of Nancy Mitford & Evelyn Waugh*, p. 260.

128 Terence Greenidge, *Evelyn Waugh in Letters*, ed. Charles Linck (Commerce, TX, 1994), p. 50.

129 Stannard, *The Early Years*, p. 475, and *No Abiding City*, p. 329 n.64. In his diaries, Waugh commemorates the incident with: 'Duff had alarming outburst of rage and hate' (Waugh, 'Saturday 18 April 1953', in *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, p. 719).

130 Wilson, *Evelyn Waugh*, pp. 103–4.

was deleted. The editor of that edition was Waugh's friend, Anthony Powell.[131] Some friends were withering in their criticism. Lady Diana Cooper told Waugh that 'his preference for "marble halls" was "hopelessly middle class"'.[132] Even Waugh's wife Laura occasionally used their class difference to get her own back on her bullying husband.[133] Most of that criticism was in reaction to Waugh's often appalling behaviour: when drunk he could be positively loutish. Regardless of where he was or who he was with, he insulted guests and hosts alike; he often treated his wife like a servant, and he always put himself first.[134] He was selfish and often ill-mannered – and that went against the grain of the very gentlemanliness to which he aspired, and which he advocated in his novels. Waugh's was consequently a double standard: he expected and encouraged perfect behaviour in others; but displayed an altogether different one himself.

Evelyn Waugh's Gentlemen Questioned

Waugh's changing depictions of the figure of the English gentleman can be truly understood only in the context of his own changing attitudes to life and the people around him. But it is now necessary to go back to the initial questions asked at the outset: are Waugh's gentlemen real, or are they mythical beasts? The answer has to be that Waugh's later gentlemen are far removed from reality. They are, frankly, too good to be true. Creating Guy Crouchback was Waugh's personal way of dealing with the abhorred Common Man. Guy incorporates all those values which Waugh saw declining around him. If we think back to Waugh's reaction to Cecil Beaton's article on the allegedly improved manners of young people, we might speculate that Waugh hoped that, if he piled every single gentlemanly virtue on to Guy, a fraction of them might rub off on his readership. But would they?

Waugh's own life is crucial for our understanding of his application of the 'gentleman' trope. It can be read like a *Bildungsroman* – but a *Bildungsroman* in reverse, the main character not arriving at the final wisdom or truth, but closing his eyes to them. If we return to Waugh's youthful interest in Bergson, we can see that he turned from a dynamic, rebellious character into a static one, whose life

131 See Wilson, *Evelyn Waugh*, p. 151.

132 Carpenter, *Children of the Sun*, p. 307.

133 See, for example, Stannard, *No Abiding City*, p. 8 where Auberon Waugh suggests that '… an awareness of [Laura's] social superiority may have helped to sustain her through a marriage …'.

134 In an unpublished letter to Laura, for example, he wrote that 'I shall not visit my children during [Christmas] leave. They should be able to retain the impression formed of me for a further three months. I can't afford to waste on them any time which could be spent on my own pleasures' (quoted in Stannard, *No Abiding City*, p. 49). Wilson also recounts one of Auberon Waugh's childhood memories which probably best sums up the extent to which Waugh put himself first. During the highest wartime austerity, Laura had managed to find three bananas. Auberon recounts: 'before the anguished eyes of his children, he poured on cream, which was almost unprocurable, and sugar, which was heavily rationed, and ate all three' (Auberon Waugh, quoted in Wilson, *Evelyn Waugh*, 125).

was dominated by preconceived prejudices. In his youth, he was perceptive of the shortcomings of modern life, but targeted them with biting satire, in order to induce his readership to address them. In later life, Waugh became increasingly unhappy with a changing world. But his only attempts to remedy the world's shortcomings consisted of creating a mythological fiction of ideal manhood, and becoming a cantankerous man himself. His own behaviour was not at all in keeping with what he idealized in his writing; he reacted to bad manners with a display of even worse ones. The fact that even he could not live up to his own ideal should have alerted him to the impossibility of his dream of the perfect knight-gentleman in the twentieth century.

In 'Evelyn Waugh's Gentlemen', Bergonzi queries whether Waugh's 'romantic ideal of the gentleman, of the fine flower of the nation, may indeed have undergone an unconditional surrender' at the end of the *Sword of Honour* trilogy.[135] That is a fair question, although the surrender does not happen in the obvious way. Guy Crouchback survives the war; not only is he reinstated on his father's estate, but he also fathers two boys, which is meant to convey hope for a new generation of gentlemanly Crouchbacks.[136] Waugh depicts him as the gentleman-survivor who holds out against the odds of modern times. But Waugh's presentation of the perfect Christian, chivalrous and aristocratic gentleman is so far removed from the truth as to make it unbelievable. What had been unconditionally surrendered, in a final and irreversible way, was Waugh's former anarchy. In *Decline and Fall*, he had dealt with the idea of the gentleman in a manner more in keeping with the time: disrespectful, sartiric, its value questioned. That not only entertained his readers, but also made them think, in a way that the simple condemnation of the new way of life of Waugh's later work does not. If Waugh had stuck to his youthful anarchy, he would have had a much more powerful weapon against the shortcomings of modern society.

Sadly, Waugh does the ideal of the gentleman in literature no favour. Admittedly, he uses the gentlemanly trope to beautiful and very evocative effects; but in presenting his reading public with a character whose moral standards are depicted as unattainable by all and sundry around him, Waugh alienates his readership even further from the very ideal he wants them to endorse. Waugh should have made better use of his changing times, by continuing to satirize declining moral standards instead of merely condemning them. By creating a perfect gentleman, who is not once tempted to stray off the path of moral rectitude when everybody else around him falters, he effectively endangered the survival of what he had hoped to celebrate.

135 Bergonzi, 'Evelyn Waugh's Gentlemen': 35.

136 Included in Guy's new, happy post-war household is also Trimmer's illegitimate son; with this Waugh clearly attempts to express the hope that, in the right surroundings and with tender loving care, even little Trimmer will grow up to be a gentleman.

Chapter 7

A Pillar Upholding Nothing:[1] Nostalgia, Englishness and the Gentleman in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*

Ishiguro, History and Englishness

Kazuo Ishiguro did *not* try to present his readership with a perfect, unattainable gentlemanly ideal. *The Remains of the Day* is different, less nostalgic but more political than Waugh's novels. First published in 1989, it was written at the height of the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher. Economic laissez-faire was encouraged; the Young Urban Professional, workaholic and power-crazed, had taken the place of the partying Bright Young People of Waugh's and Powell's youth. The British Empire had all but disappeared, and Britain was struggling for her place in the world hierarchy. Ishiguro's novel uses quintessentially English stereotypes, such as the gentleman, the butler, and the trope of the country house, in order to reflect on national identity and, crucially, a national consciousness. The narrative frame of the novel is cunningly set in 1956, a pivotal year in British history. On the political scene, it was the year of the Suez Crisis. The British reaction to it has repeatedly been derided as an 'imperial reflex – a reaction based on prejudices and attitudes inherited from the nineteenth century but quite inappropriate to the modern world'.[2] Effectively, the Suez Crisis saw the final diminution of Britain as an imperial power. On the home front, 1956 saw increasing public agitation about nuclear weapons.[3] In

1 Title taken from the sentence 'We see, even if he doesn't, the truth behind the greatness he has spent a life-time serving, and as he resumes his place stiffly under the arch, he is clearly a pillar of dignity upholding nothing', in Deborah Guth, 'Submerged Narratives in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 35/2 (1999): 130.

2 Robert Skidelsky, 'The Lessons of Suez', in Vernon Bogdanor and Robert Skidelsky (eds), *The Age of Affluence, 1951–1964* (London, 1970), p. 169.

3 The year 1954 had seen the Hydrogen Bomb National Campaign, which was followed, in early 1957, by the Committee for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapon Tests. There was also the Emergency Committee for Direct Action, founded in 1954, which staged occasional sit-down protests at nuclear airbases. January 1958 eventually saw the founding of the CND, which gathered increasing numbers of followers over the next few years. For more information, see Robert Taylor, 'The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament,' in Bogdanor and Skidelsky (eds), *The Age of Affluence*, pp. 221–53.

literature, it saw the beginning of the Establishment-challenging Angry Young Man Movement.

Against these historical and social events, Ishiguro sets his novel in the most traditional of English environments: the country house. It narrates the life, not of an outspoken new man demanding his rights, but of a subservient butler, and his relationship with the people closest to him: his father, yet another traditional butler, the Hall's housekeeper Miss Kenton, and, most importantly, his employer, Lord Darlington. Ishiguro uses this traditional setting and his cast of stereotypical characters to question the immediate past, presented in flashbacks to the 1920s, and through that to investigate a sense of national guilt. At first, *The Remains of the Day* could be misconstrued as a merely nostalgic novel; but the nostalgia soon begins to jar uncomfortably with the underlying political questions the novel asks: questions regarding British Appeasement politics, aristocratic sympathizing with the Nazis, and the stance of the individual towards them. The conclusion is that the novel is critical of its very nostalgia, and, as such, *The Remains of the Day* is an important contribution to late twentieth-century literature. Crucially, Ishiguro also analyses the idea of the gentleman, and deconstructs not only its importance but also the veneration that has always accompanied it. The novel is constructed around quintessential gentlemanly values, such as tradition, honour, loyalty, dignity and duty, and questions their validity. Uniquely, it presents its readers with a view from below, with a servant as protagonist. This gives scope for critical debate, as Ishiguro shows how members of different social classes react to the gentlemanly ideal, how they adopt it, how they adapt to it, and how they can ultimately be broken by it.

Notions of Englishness loom large in the novel. It is not only the setting, of a country house with an authentic lord, which gives it a very English outlook, but also the protagonist himself: the old-fashioned butler is a national stereotype. Walter Lippman argues that stereotypes are 'pictures in our head' which are generally 'fed to the public through the media'.[4] The profession of the butler is, very much like the ideal of the gentleman, one of those quintessentially English ideas, imitated, but also ridiculed worldwide, and that often through the media. Every year on New Year's Eve, for example, German television celebrates a piece of Englishness as seen through the eyes of German TV producers. At the same time and on the same channels every year – 'same procedure as last year' – they screen English Vaudeville actor Freddie Frinton's *Dinner for One*. In the twenty-minute black-and-white film Frinton plays aged butler James to 90-something Miss Sophie who, in the eccentric manner expected of an old English lady – yet another stereotype? – insists on celebrating her birthday every year with her four best friends, despite the fact that they have long since passed away. But James the butler is always there, and he not only imitates them, but also, crucially, drinks for them. Several courses and as many different alcoholic beverages later, a very inebriated James takes Miss Sophie upstairs. 'Same procedure as last year, Miss Sophie?' 'Same procedure as every year,

4 Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (1922), quoted in Susan Condor, '"Having History": A Social Psychological Exploration of Anglo-British Autostereotypes', in C.C. Barfoot (ed.), *Beyond Pug's Tour: National and Ethnic Stereotyping in Theory and Literary Practice* (Amsterdam, 1997), p. 213.

James.' A last wink to the audience, and James leads Miss Sophie upstairs, leaving the audience to guess what this last 'same procedure' upstairs might entail.

In this short film, many foreigners' notions of Englishness are dealt with: the aristocratic old lady who tries to defy time by clinging to old customs; the faithful retainer whose duty knows, literally, no bounds. This picture of the dutiful butler is a cliché of Englishness abroad – one only has to think of the world-wide success of the TV series *Upstairs, Downstairs*, with the butler, Hudson, as the heart and soul of the house in Eaton Square. Stevens, the butler in Ishiguro's novel, fits the same category, and notions of Englishness in *The Remains of the Day* are all the more obvious for the fact that he himself stresses them. He feels at odds with his new foreign employer's ways, obviously 'an American gentleman's unfamiliarity with what was and what was not commonly done in England' (*TROTD*, p. 4). The fact that Darlington Hall has been taken over by an American after Lord Darlington's death points to the dilemma many landed families faced during the 1950s: estates could no longer be kept up. The Englishness of the traditional country-house setting is henceforth threatened by the alien influences of the rich foreigners who can afford to buy them but who are not (yet) familiar with their traditions – though anxious to acquire 'the real thing' (*TROTD*, p. 124), including the stereotypical butler. Stevens, on the subject of Englishness, claims that 'it has been my privilege to see the best of England … within [Darlington Hall's] walls' (*TROTD*, p. 4). He even enthuses about the 'greatness' of the English landscape which marks it 'as the most deeply satisfying in the world' (*TROTD*, p. 28) – a statement ironically marred by the fact that he has never been outside England and hardly ever outside the vicinity of Darlington Hall, and thus has no point of comparison beyond what he has seen in books. Stevens's own profession fills him with patriotric fervour:

> It is sometimes said that butlers only truly exist in England. Other countries, whatever title is actually used, have only manservants. I tend to believe this is true. Continentals are unable to be butlers because they are as a breed incapable of the emotional restraint which only the English race are capable of. ... [W]hen you think of a great butler, he is bound, almost by definition, to be an Englishman. (*TROTD*, p. 43)

Ishiguro felt ambiguous about the England he created in *The Remains of the Day*. In an interview with Alan Vorda he explains that

> the kind of England that I create in *The Remains of the Day* is not an England *that I believe ever existed*. I've not attempted to reproduce, in a historically accurate way, some past period. What I'm trying to do here … is to actually *rework a particular myth* about a certain kind of England. I think there is this very strong idea that exists in England at the moment, about an England where people lived in the not-so-distant past, that conformed to various stereotypical images. That is to say an England with sleepy, beautiful villages with very polite people and butlers and people taking tea on the lawn. Now, at the moment, particularly in Britain, there is an enormous nostalgia industry going on … trying to recapture this kind of old England. The mythical landscape of this sort of England, to

> a large degree, is harmless nostalgia for a time that didn't exist. The other side of this, however, is that it is used as a political tool.[5]

This comment sets the tone for a close reading of the novel. The italicized words point to Ishiguro's aim in creating his novel: unlike Waugh, he set out neither to create an adulatory monument to the ideal of the gentleman, nor to recreate an Arcadian English past. He rather wants to tackle the *myth* which has grown up around England's glorious past. He consciously attacks political movements of the 1980s which urged a reconsideration of Britain's past greatness – Margaret Thatcher's previously mentioned call for a return to Victorian values, for example, or John Major's appropriation of Orwell's vision of England. For political reasons, Ishiguro does not approve of this fictionalization of the past. His idea to '*rework a particular myth*' expresses his doubts about the way aspects of the past have been (mis)represented. Fowler explains that '"myth" and "mythical" have long been commonly used in contexts opposing them to "truth" or "reality"'.[6] In *The Remains of the Day*, Ishiguro consequently warns of the dangers of a nostalgia which whitewashes the past. He queries the veneration of the figure of the gentleman, the mythologizing of the country house, and ultimately questions our right to feel nostalgia for them. In contrast to Waugh, Ishiguro's novel shows the shortcomings of a gentlemanly ideal which has been emulated for centuries. That does not mean that at the end of the novel he comes to the conclusion that the gentleman as an ideal has to be abolished. What he does is to warn of mindlessly copying and applying traditional ideals without recognizing the need to adapt them to changing times.

Before embarking on a discussion of the novel, a few words should be said about the profession of its protagonist. The term 'butler' is derived from the mediaeval yeoman of the buttery, who was responsible mainly for the brewing and serving of beer. In Victorian times – the halcyon days of the profession – the butler, along with the cook, housekeeper, valet and lady's maid, was one of the upper servants. He had to ensure the smooth running of the household, supervise the other servants, and he was in charge of the house silver and the wine-cellar. The average butler started service in a minor position in the household, and from there worked his way up to the position of under-footman, first footman and under-butler.

As head of the household, the butler was highly respected by his fellow servants, who addressed him as 'Mister' – principally because he was their immediate superior, but also because his position had grown out of former gentlemanly professions; master and mistress of the house called him by his surname. They entrusted their reputation to him; a bad butler could be a stumbling block for any family. Elizabeth Drury cites that '"[a] Butler … who knows his duties, and performs them with zeal, integrity, and ability, cannot be too highly prized"' and concludes that 'upon him

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5 Alan Vorda, 'Stuck on the Margins: An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro', in Alan Vorda (ed.), *Face to Face: Interviews with Contemporary Novelists* (Houston, 1993), pp. 14–5, emphases mine.

6 Roger Fowler (ed.), *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, Revised and Enlarged Edition (London, 1987), p. 153.

depended not only his master's comfort but his reputation as a host'.[7] Often, the butler was so formidable a figure that he inspired even his betters with awe. Pamela Horn recounts the case of a butler at Longleat who 'was far too grand a figure to roll up his sleeves and work in his own pantry; and in the dining room he would serve only the wine and the more imposing dishes. Even the house-steward would always knock at the pantry door out of respect for the butler'.[8] Pride in his station has always been one of the butler's characteristics. An efficient butler was able to mediate between master and servants in order to ensure their smooth co-existence under one roof. Späth explains that 'in a country in which language and manners are regarded as distinctive of class their being able to speak like gentlemen would put them in a unique position between the separate worlds of upstairs and downstairs'.[9]

In literature the butler has also found his niche. In the inimitable Jeeves, P.G. Wodehouse has erected a memorial to the profession, although, strictly speaking, Jeeves is a gentleman's gentleman. Other remarkable butlers can be found in Thomas Hardy's *The Hand of Ethelberta*, Waugh's *Decline and Fall*, Ivy Compton-Burnett's *Manservant and Maidservant*, Rose Tremain's *Sadler's Birthday*, Iris Murdoch's *Jackson's Dilemma* and, in particular, J.M. Barrie's play *The Admirable Crichton*.[10]

Since its publication in 1989, *The Remains of the Day* has attracted considerable debate. Most critics have concentrated on the novel's narrative style and the unreliability of its narration, aspects of memory, and of its postcolonial politics.[11] Many critics also stress the peculiar Japaneseness of the novel, linking notions of

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7 *The Servants' Practical Guide* (1880), quoted in Elizabeth Drury, *Victorian Household Hints* (Oxford, 1994), p. 11. See also for the historical development of the term 'butler' and the position he held in the household.

8 Pamela Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (Dublin, 1975), p. 77.

9 Eberhard Späth, 'P.G. Wodehouse's Jeeves: The Butler as Superman', in U. Broich, T. Stemmler and G. Stratmann (eds), *Functions of Literature: Essays Presented to Erwin Wolff on His Sixtieth Birthday* (Tübingen, 1984), p. 280.

10 *The Admirable Crichton* lends itself to comparison with *The Remains of the Day* as an example of different approaches to duty. Its main protagonists are, on the one hand, a liberal master who believes in the equality of humans, and treats his servants to monthly tea receptions served by his reluctant daughters, and, on the other, a highly conservative butler, Crichton, who is ashamed at his lordship's liberal attitudes. After they have been shipwrecked on a desert island, Crichton becomes a firm believer in Darwin's theories of 'the survival of the fittest', takes over command, and has everybody else work for him – including Lord Loam. Back in England, however, they all revert to their old roles.

11 See, for example, M. Griffiths, 'Great English Houses / New Homes in England?: Memory and Identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* and V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*', *SPAN* 36 (1993): 488–503; Susie O'Brien, 'Serving a New World-Order: Postcolonial Politics in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*', *Modern Fiction Studies* 42/4 (1996): 787–806; John Rothfork, 'Zen Comedy in Postcolonial Literature: Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 29/1 (March 1996): 79–102; Meera Tamaya, 'Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*: The Empire Strikes Back', *Modern Language Studies* 22/2 (1992): 45–56; and Kathleen Wall, '*The Remains of the Day* and Its Challenges to Theories of Unreliable Narration', *Journal of Narrative Technique* 24/1 (Winter 1994): 18–42.

ritual, duty and honour to Japanese national characteristics.[12] Arguably, this stance turns a blind eye to the fact that these are also quintessentially *English* character traits. Steven Connor supports this: 'The novel maintains a clear parallel between the slowly, reluctantly enlarging awareness of Stevens, and the sense of Englishness as a whole. The disavowal of feeling, the strict partition between the private and public realms, the stiffening of the will to maintain conventional appearances, and the concomitant fear of the collapse of distinction – everything, in fact, summed up for Stevens in the quality he calls "dignity" – is also identified as essentially English'.[13] Ishiguro himself rejects being labelled 'a Japanese author'. In a dialogue with the Japanese writer Kenzaburo Oe, he explains that he considers himself 'a European writer', and that he 'was forced to write in a more international way' because of 'my not knowing Japan very well'.[14] Oe, in contrast, elaborates that 'your style always involves a double structure, with two or more intertwined elements. … this kind of strength was not very Japanese. … this person was, rather, from England'.[15]

So far, however, no critic has concentrated on the peculiar 'constructedness' of the novel around themes of gentlemanliness. Davis states that all of Ishiguro's novels have 'recurring themes: dignity, self-deception, devalued ideals, repressed emotions and the high cost of displaced loyalty'.[16] Dignity, sorrow at lost values, repressed emotions and unwavering loyalty are also defining characteristics of gentlemanliness: remember George Sherston constructing his very own idea of England, in order to block out the horrors of the war; Robert Graves keeping a tight reign on his emotions, and taking up boxing as an outlet for them; Nick Jenkins ageing with dignity, never deviating from the path of gentlemanly virtue he has chosen for himself; Tony Last's unfaltering devotion to the home of his ancestors; Guy Crouchback sticking to what he perceives as chivalric ideals during the Second World War. *The Remains of the Day* continues this tradition – but gives it a new twist.

These gentlemanly themes of 'dignity, self-deception, devalued ideals, repressed emotions and the high cost of displaced loyalty' will be employed to show how Stevens (mis)constructs his life. This means returning full circle to ideas of self-fashioning. Stevens believes that, in modelling his life according to these themes, in trying to offer loyal, dignified service to – as he perceives it – a great man like Lord Darlington, some of this man's glory will rub off on to himself, and make his life

12 For example, Davis, who claims that '*The Remains of the Day* is, as its title suggests, written in that favourite Japanese form, the elegy for vanished rites; it is a 'vespers novel'. Through the recollections of … Stevens's years of service … Ishiguro will reveal essential aspects of the Japanese character. … The butler's attention to detail and pride in his work is comparable to that of an *origami* maker. His insistence on ritual, his stoicism in performing his duties … his unswerving loyalty to his master – all these are prominent aspects of the Japanese collective psyche. There is, moreover, an element of *bushido* in Stevens's notions of honour and "dignity"…' (Rocío G. Davis, 'Imaginary Homelands Revisited in the Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro', *Miscelánia: a Journal of English and American Studies* 15 (1994): 144.

13 Steven Connor, *The English Novel in History, 1950–1955* (London, 1996), p. 105.

14 Kazuo Ishiguro / Kenzaburo Oe, 'Wave Patterns, A Dialogue', *Grand Street* 10/2 (1991): 82.

15 Ishiguro / Oe, 'Wave Patterns': 82.

16 Davis, 'Imaginary Homelands': 145.

worthwhile. It is Ishiguro's unique take on these values which makes this novel such a valuable contribution to the gentlemanly debate.

A Pillar Upholding Nothing: The Gentleman in *The Remains of the Day*

'One should not be looking back to the past so much' (*TROTD*, p. 139), reasons Stevens. Nevertheless, that is what he does for most of the narrative, struggling to make sense of the events which have dominated his life. At first glance, *The Remains of the Day* is a novel about memory. During a six-day motoring trip across the West Country, Stevens reviews his past life. What begins with gentle reminiscences ends in genuine soul-searching, and a questioning not only of his own but also of his country's past, a process which *Remains* shares with Ishiguro's other novels: *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), *The Unconsoled* (1995), *When We Were Orphans* (2000) and *Never Let Me Go* (2005). Petry explains that the novels' 'main concern is the intermingling of one's personal past (biography) on the one hand (and especially how people try to cope with their past), and society's collective memory (history) on the other'.[17] Interwoven in the protagonists' past is the collective past of their respective countries: for example, the widow Etsuko of *A Pale View of Hills* and the artist Ono of *An Artist of the Floating World* relive life in post-atomic-bomb Japan; in *When We Were Orphans*, Christopher Banks remembers his childhood in the war-torn Shanghai of the 1920s; and butler Stevens in *The Remains of the Day* relives the pre-war decades at Darlington Hall, which saw his admired lord's ill-fated involvement in the British politics of appeasement. The novel points to an important fact: an individual's past cannot be read out of the context of his country's past. Coming to terms with one's *own* past simultaneously leads to a working through the country's past. In the course of his journey, Stevens realizes that his mistakes have made him an accomplice to a dark chapter in British history.

For Stevens, who has dedicated his entire life to unfailing service, his journey provides a unique opportunity, not only to get away from it all, but also simply to have time on his hands – something which the *Überbutler* Stevens is unused to. He has time, not only to look around the glories of the English countryside, but also to think – not about staff plans or other duties, but about his life, about opportunities both taken and missed. The novel thus becomes a *Bildungsroman*: Stevens's journey to the West Country becomes a journey through his past and into his soul, which helps him realize how misconstructed his life has been. Never before has he met people as fellow human beings on an equal footing, rather than as social superiors or inferiors. His mind, like the house he lives in, has always been divided into upstairs and downstairs. In the immediate surroundings of Darlington Hall, he can consider no one, with the possible exceptions of the housekeeper and of visiting butlers, as social equals. With himself at the centre of his social world, he can neither socialize

17 Mike Petry, *Narratives of Memory and Identity: The Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro* (Frankfurt, 1999), p. 7.

with his betters upstairs – after all, he knows *his* place – nor fraternize with his inferiors in the servants' hall – they should know *their* place.

Stevens's memories take the reader back to the Darlington Hall of the early 1920s, when all still *seems* to be well in English society: aristocratic Lord Darlington resides in the ancestral seat of his family, and butler Stevens wields unlimited power over an army of servants. In Stevens's eyes, the world is as it ought to be. He is not only the respected head of the staff but also, from his Lordship's point of view, the trusted and trustworthy major-domo from whom one has to keep nothing secret.[18] The world described by Stevens in these memories is one of country houses, aristocratic visitors and banquets, with Stevens as the head of staff, organizing everything, in his own words, 'like a general might prepare for a battle' (*TROTD*, p. 77). Recalling the big conference of 1923 held at Darlington Hall, Stevens oozes professional pride: 'it was a turning point in my life' because it was 'the moment in my career when I truly came of age as a butler' (*TROTD*, p. 70). This, in general, is the gist of Stevens's memories: triumphant episodes of himself as butler, mastering any situation and putting his duty before private longings. But it is open to debate whether these are really the stories he wants to convey. Stevens's narration is highly unreliable. It is the subject-matter of memory itself which is problematic. In an interview with Gregory Mason, Ishiguro states that 'things like memory, how one uses memory for one's own purposes, one's own ends, those things interest me more deeply'.[19] In *A Pale View of Hills*, Etsuko realizes that 'memory ... can be an unreliable thing; often it is heavily coloured by the circumstances in which one remembers' (*APVOH*, p. 156). Even with the best intentions, memories will always be highly subjective. Stevens's narrative style is defensive; comments such as 'why should I hide it?' (*TROTD*, p. 4) indicate immediately that there might indeed be something for Stevens to hide. This is underlined by oft-repeated little phrases, such as 'let me make this clear', 'I should say', 'let me say' etc. (*TROTD*, pp. 5, 10). They also make his style tedious and irritating. Although Stevens wants to review his life, he also wants to safeguard himself against attack with every sentence.

The unreliability of Stevens's narration becomes particularly visible in the case of Miss Kenton's oft-quoted letter. While one does not doubt the existence of the letter, it is the tenor of it one has to question: as the reader, one is never presented with an actual version of it. Stevens lets out information about its contents only when opportune, for example to defend his planned meeting with Miss Kenton – the main reason behind his trip – to convince himself of the genuineness of her wish to return to Darlington Hall: 'I have, I should make clear, reread Miss Kenton's recent letter several times, and there is no possibility I am merely imagining the presence of these hints on her part' (*TROTD*, p. 10). But as his journey progresses, Stevens himself begins to voice doubts about his interpretation of Miss Kenton's words. Gentle doubts at first – 'admittedly, she does not at any point in her letter state explicitly her desire to return; but that is the unmistakable message conveyed by the general nuance of many of the passages, imbued as they are with a deep nostalgia

18 See *TROTD*, p. 74.

19 Gregory Mason, 'An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro', *Contemporary Literature* 30/3 (1989): 347.

for her days at Darlington Hall' – but getting stronger: 'In fact, one has to accept the distinct possibility that one may have previously – perhaps through wishful thinking of a professional kind – exaggerated what evidence there was regarding such a desire on her part' (*TROTD*, pp. 48; 140). Eventually, Stevens has to admit that he misread the letter altogether. It is up to the reader to piece together what little information he reveals – and to be wary of his seemingly assured narrative. It also has to be recognized that Stevens's highly unreliable narration lends some irony to its contents. In the case of Miss Kenton's misinterpreted letter, for example, Stevens's pompous style ridicules the over-importance he places both on his own position and the house he serves in. Lodge says that Stevens's 'life has been based on the suppression and evasion of the truth, about himself and about others. His narrative is a kind of confession, but it is riddled with devious self-justification and special pleading… '.[20] This consistent evasion of the truth has marred Stevens's life and led him to worship the wrong deity.

Stevens's narrative style makes it hard for the reader to relate to him. Stevens's stiff and restricted verbal style, like his person, reflects his emotional repression. After all, 'one' does not want to bare 'one's' soul to the readers. Lawrence Graver aptly termed his style a 'corseted idiom'.[21] Stevens does not express what he really wants to say. This can be recognized in his general tendency not to call a spade a spade: he often avoids people's names, and, in particular, reverts to the impersonal 'one' rather than use the appropriate personal pronoun.[22] This narrative style is often difficult to follow – to whom *is* he referring? – but is also intriguing. It is the *obliqueness* of the narration which makes it so interesting, the blanks that it is up to the reader to fill. Things are not actually said, but only implied. With this narrative technique, Ishiguro cunningly leaves open the possibility of diverse and individual interpretations.

Stevens's life is based not on seven, but three pillars of wisdom: dignity, repression of emotion, and unquestioning loyalty, and he subjects himself to a strict regime, in order to attain perfection in all three of them.

For Stevens, dignity is the one quintessential gentlemanly quality.[23] His service to His Lordship, his duty, his behaviour – everything revolves around the question of dignity, how to achieve it and, equally important, how to keep it. The question of dignity for Stevens is ultimately linked to the problem of being a 'great butler'. The 'Hayes Society for Butlers', often quoted by its acolyte Stevens, demands that 'the most crucial criterion is that the applicant be possessed of a *dignity* in keeping with his position' (*TROTD*, p. 33). This lofty pronouncement comes to dominate

20 David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* (London, 1992), p. 155.

21 Lawrence Graver, 'What the Butler Saw', *The New York Times Book Review* (8 October 1989): 3.

22 See, for example, *TROTD*, p. 17: '… *one* does not have the means to discuss and corroborate views with *one*'s fellow professionals in the way *one* once did. Not so long ago, if any such points of ambiguity arose regarding *one*'s duties, *one* had the comfort of knowing that before long some fellow professional whose opinion *one* respected would be accompanying their employer to the house …' (emphases mine).

23 See *TROTD*, p. 185: 'one would suspect that the quality being referred to might be most usefully termed "dignity"'.

Stevens's life; he admits that 'dignity is something one can meaningfully strive for throughout one's career', and that it is 'a professional responsibility for all of us to think deeply about these things so that each of us may better strive towards attaining 'dignity' for ourselves' (*TROTD*, pp. 33; 44).

Stevens's mistake in the attempt at attaining dignity is his failure to recognize that the notion of dignity itself is mythical. It is one of those elusive terms open to individual interpretation. In Stevens's case, he unreservedly equates it with keeping a stiff upper lip and with untiring service. He explains that 'any butler who regards his vocation with pride, any butler who aspires at all to a "dignity in keeping with his position," as the Hayes Society once put it, should never allow himself to be "off duty" in the presence of others' (*TROTD*, pp. 168–9). The private face of Stevens is thus forever obscured by his professional mask: ever alert, ever dutiful. Professionalism and dignity, Stevens believes, can be worn like a suit.[24] The image of 'dignity-as-clothes' reappears again later in the novel during a conversation with a village doctor: '"What do you think dignity's all about?" … "It's rather a hard thing to explain in a few words, sir. … But I suspect it comes down to not removing one's clothing in public"' (*TROTD*, p. 210). Stevens fears exposure and embarrassment. In his protective suit of professionalism he feels safe; it gives him status and, he believes, dignity.

Stevens takes this preoccupation with dignity too far. He shuts himself off so effectively from the rest of the world, places himself on so high a pedestal of unapproachable butlering greatness that, towards the end of the novel, he realizes not only that he is all alone, but also, and for him all the more relevantly, that he has wasted his life in fruitlessly striving for dignity. He recognizes that dignity does not lie simply in serving somebody one considers to be a great man, but it has more to do with being able to make one's own mistakes, and to face the music afterwards. His conclusion is sad: '"You see, I *trusted*. I trusted in his lordship's wisdom. All those years I served him, I trusted I was doing something worthwhile. I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really – one has to ask oneself – what dignity is there in that?' (*TROTD,* p. 243). In striving for dignity all his life, Stevens fails to realize that dignity has many manifestations, and can be interpreted differently in varying situations. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948 sets out that 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'.[25] In the pursuit of his professional dignity, Stevens neglects his dignity as an individual. His quest for dignity costs him his personal freedom and individuality.

For Stevens, keeping his dignity goes hand in hand with repressing his emotions. It is his relationship to two people – his father and the housekeeper Miss Kenton – which tests his endurance for emotional repression, and these will both be touched on briefly.

Stevens's relationship to his father is an ambiguous one. Always in search of role-models, he admires his father as 'a professional of the highest class' (*TROTD*, p. 51) whose professionalism is so pronounced that he even volunteers to wait on the

24 See *TROTD*, pp. 42–3.

25 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), Article One.

very man responsible for his eldest son's death in the Boer War. But simultaneously Stevens finds it hard to relate to him as a father. It is the same with Miss Kenton: he appreciates her as a dedicated professional, but fears her as a woman.

The real test for Stevens comes during the all-important conference of 1923, when his filial duties are in conflict with his professional ones. As the guests assemble in the dining room for the final dinner, his father lies dying. Once again, and certainly most successfully, Stevens hides behind his professional mask. The show must go on, the conference conclude smoothly. All he admits to is that the situation is 'most distressing' (*TROTD*, p. 104). His father's death seems to come at an inconvenient time.

Despite almost superhuman efforts, his carefully preserved mask cracks on two occasions. Young Mr. Cardinal is the first to realize that something is wrong, and it is finally Lord Darlington himself who stops him: '"Stevens, are you alright? … You look as though you're crying." I laughed and taking out a handkerchief, quickly wiped my face. "I'm very sorry, sir. The strains of a hard day"' (*TROTD*, p. 105). Concerned as he is with his ever-professional appearance, Stevens cannot admit to crying. However, there is one clear indication of his real feelings: when he suddenly perceives the room as 'a forest of black dinner jackets, grey hair and cigar smoke' (*TROTD*, p. 106), it becomes clear that, for once, he is intimidated and daunted by the task in hand.

On the surface, Stevens hides behind his duty. He fears that Lord Darlington might feel let down if he were to put care of his father above his duty to the house. But it is more than that. Stevens avoids his father's sickbed because he is afraid of his emotions. In the last conversation between father and son, it is Stevens senior who tries to make amends for missed opportunities: '"I am proud of you. A good son. I hope I have been a good father to you. I suppose I haven't" (*TROTD*, p. 97). All Stevens junior can muster in reply is a mechanical, repetitive and very evasive '"I am glad Father is feeling so much better"' (*TROTD*, p. 97). Even an aspiring great butler such as Stevens cannot completely block out filial feelings at his father's death, and he fears a breakdown might lead to the loss of his dignity in the eyes of the other servants. For him, dignity and grief are incompatible.

They may be incompatible at a personal level; artistically, however, they collaborate well, creating an effective dramatic tension. As readers, we can sympathize with Stevens's plight while at the same time condemning his course of action, or his choice of action as he sees it. While his character enlists the gentlemanly principle in one respect – by stoically adhering to duty whatever the circumstances – Ishiguro makes use of it in another, by registering its traditional appeal while observing that it is misguided, if not inhuman, to insist on it in certain circumstances.

Stevens firmly believes that his behaviour at his father's death is something to be proud of. In fact, his refusal to be distracted by it, and his determination to put the conference first, is a triumph of his will against the odds, something which the professional in him can still gloat about after more than thirty years: 'For all its sad associations, whenever I recall that evening today, I find I do so with a large sense of triumph' (*TROTD*, p. 110). It is also something which, he believes, his father would have wanted: '"I know my father would have wished me to carry on just now"' (*TROTD*, p. 106). But the fact that Stevens feels the need to justify his behaviour

to Miss Kenton implies that he recognizes how improper it must look in the eyes of others.

Where Miss Kenton is concerned, things are even more complicated for Stevens. Although he explains early on in the novel that he does not approve of inter-staff marriages, it is obvious that Miss Kenton means much to him.[26] However, there is only one unveiled instance of his feelings for her in the novel – but he does not see the significance of it:

> Then she was standing before me, and suddenly the atmosphere underwent a peculiar change – almost as though the two of us had been suddenly thrust on to some other plane of being altogether. I am afraid it is not easy to describe clearly what I mean here. All I can say is that everything around us suddenly became very still. … Miss Kenton's manner also underwent a sudden change; there was a strange seriousness in her expression, and it struck me she seemed almost frightened. (*TROTD*, pp. 166–7)

Stevens pulls away from the intimacy of that scene: 'I judged it best to look away ... but with her person positioned so closely, this could only be achieved by my twisting my head away at a somewhat unnatural angle' (*TROTD*, p. 167). For the reader, this interlude is painful. Stevens's style gives away no emotion. All his life, he has tried to model himself on other great butlers, on his dutiful father, on his adored lordship, and he cannot adapt to change. He had always foreseen his future clearly: a life dedicated to service. There had never been space in it for a woman. Miss Kenton endangers this future. Stevens fears that to give in to his longing for her will mean the end of his ordered existence as the perfect butler. What one can read between the lines of this little paragraph is revealing. When he talks about 'the two of us ... suddenly thrust on to some other plane of being altogether', he really wants to talk about the fact that, for a few moments, he has eyes and ears for no one else but Miss Kenton. When he says 'I am afraid it is not easy to describe clearly what I mean here', for once he reveals the truth in that he was 'afraid', afraid of the emotions which threatened to overwhelm him at that moment. 'Everything around us suddenly became very still' shows clearly that, faced with Miss Kenton and his own feelings, everything else recedes into the background – the house, the other members of staff, even Lord Darlington. The professional in him gains the upper hand only when he twists his head at an unnatural angle in order to avoid further contact with Miss Kenton. 'Unnatural' signifies Stevens's emotional state of mind.

In his obsession with dignity, Stevens strives for perfection. And that obsession with perfection means, for him, the avoidance of all human contact of a non-professional nature. He is afraid that, by showing affection for another person, he may appear vulnerable to the world at large. But his measures to ensure his professional status are too drastic, and, far from preserving his dignity, achieve the opposite, at times turning him into a caricature. When, at their final meeting, Miss Kenton wonders 'about a life I may have had with you, Mr. Stevens', he finally admits the true state of his heart and mind: 'at that moment, my heart was breaking' (*TROTD*, p. 239).

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26 See *TROTD*, p. 51.

Stevens's emotional suffering is certainly self-inflicted, in that he always made a conscious decision for duty over love. But, for all that, one cannot judge him. In the end, all one sees is a lonely man who threw away his one chance of love, and who has finally, and very painfully, come to realize it.

It is Stevens's misplaced loyalties which are of particular interest in the novel, in that they are inseparably linked up with his conception of gentlemanliness: Lord Darlington is a gentleman; therefore Stevens, feudal notions firmly ingrained in him, wants to serve him, and to be loyal to him. For Stevens, it is as simple as that.

Loyalty is dealt with in most novels about gentlemen and menservants. Jeeves is loyal to Bertie because he has so chosen, and because Bertie provides an intellectual challenge. Henry James's butler Brooksmith is loyal to his master because of the mental stimulation he finds in the household. When eventually he has to look for a new position, he confides that '"I dare say it will be rather poor ... but I've seen the fireworks, haven't I? ... it can't be fireworks *every* night. After Mansfield Street there ain't much choice"'.[27] Rose Tremain's butler Sadler is so loyal to his master and mistress that they make him their heir. In Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*, painter Ono exclaims that 'loyalty has to be earned. There's too much made of loyalty. All too often men talk of loyalty and follow blindly' (*AOTFW*, p. 72). Stevens's loyalties are inextricably bound up with duty and dignity, and for once he does not repress his emotions: he openly admires Lord Darlington. But the loyalty Stevens feels for his lordship has mutated into an unconditional subordination to, as he sees it, a superior being: '"As far as I am concerned ... my vocation will not be fulfilled until I have done all I can to see his lordship through the great tasks he has set himself. The day his lordship's work is complete, the day *he* is able to rest on his laurels, content in the knowledge that he has done all anyone could ever reasonably ask of him, only on that day ... will I be able to call myself ... a well-contented man"' (*TROTD*, p. 173). For Stevens, this is his life's guiding principle.

For Stevens, being a great butler ultimately depends on being 'attached to a distinguished household' (*TROTD*, p. 113). By 'distinguished', he does not necessarily mean serving an aristocratic master. It is in this that he sees the difference between his own and his father's generation of butlers, who strove for employment by a socially prestigious master. For Stevens, 'professional prestige' lies in the 'moral worth' (*TROTD*, p. 114) of the employer.

Stevens's preoccupation with the morals of his master reflects changing notions of gentlemanliness. Although the importance he places on an employer's morals is laudable, it is out of keeping with his times, which saw not only a demise in manners and morals but also, and more importantly for Stevens's prospects, a decline in grand houses, with consequent reduced employment opportunities for butlers.[28]

In Lord Darlington, Stevens feels that he has reached his destination and his destiny. He says that 'I myself moved quite rapidly from employer to employer

27 Henry James, 'Brooksmith (1891)', in *Collected Stories* (London, 1962), p. 411.

28 This is highlighted several times in the novel when Stevens refers to houses which are dust-sheeted, survive with one servant-factotum, or have to give up servants altogether. This is also reflected in his own staffing problems, once Mr. Farraday has taken over the house.

during my early career – being aware that these situations were incapable of bringing me lasting satisfaction – before being *rewarded* at last with the opportunity to serve Lord Darlington' (*TROTD*, p. 116; emphasis mine). For him, Lord Darlington is the epitome of the gentleman, and furthermore an employer who actively tries to advance the progress of humanity. The irony is harsh: the master in whose morality Stevens believes so firmly becomes a supporter of the British Blackshirts; Lord Darlington, the gentleman, proves to be far from the ideal gentleman when he insists that Stevens dismiss two Jewish housemaids. But Stevens closes his eyes to the truth: be believes Lord Darlington to be worthy of his loyalty, and follows blindly. He overestimates not only his lordship's worth, but also the political influence of houses such as Darlington Hall where, he believes, crucial political decisions are made.

Stevens strives to leave his mark on the world, and believes that he can do so by means of the smooth running of a distinguished person's household.[29] He even boasts that 'the state of the silver had made a small, but significant contribution towards the easing of relations between Lord Halifax and Herr Ribbentrop that evening' (*TROTD*, p. 136). Shut up as he is in his narrow world of 'butlering greatness', Stevens loses touch with reality. Taken in by the praise directed at his silver, he fails to see the political significance of that meeting, held under his Lordship's roof.

Lord Darlington, in turn, implicitly trusts Stevens. But he also abuses his willingness to be ready for any task whatever, for example when he entrusts him to convey the 'facts of life' (*TROTD*, pp. 81–3) to his godson. For Stevens, unusual jobs like that are the ultimate proof of Lord Darlington's trust in him. But the reader begins to wonder whether Lord Darlington is not taking things too far; nowhere more so than when Stevens is ridiculed by His Lordship's friends. Confronted by queries about world politics, he repeatedly replies with a polite '"I'm very sorry, sir, but I am unable to be of assistance on this matter"' (*TROTD*, p. 195). In his recollection of the scene, Stevens claims that 'I … quickly saw the situation for what it was; that is to say, it was clearly expected that I be baffled by the question,' and 'I was by this point well on top of the situation' (*TROTD*, p. 195). It is not the point whether or not Stevens really was 'on top of the situation'. As he sees it, his duty prevents him from stating opinions to superiors. He realizes that Lord Darlington's friends try to prove that a man in his situation ought to stand mutely and meekly in a corner, and to have no opinion of his own. In his failure to react, he sadly proves them right, letting himself be pushed willingly into the role of the dumb waiter. He accepts humiliation as part of his duty, and waves away Lord Darlington's attempts at apology with a nonchalant '"Thank you, sir. But I am happy to assure you I was not unduly inconvenienced"' (*TROTD*, p. 197).

Interestingly, Stevens's narration is interspersed with metaphors of shadow and semi-darkness, as opposed to those of light. He depicts himself as constantly hovering in shadowy corners and dim corridors.[30] Shadow and light are two opposing terms. Yet the one cannot exist without the other. Where there is light, there is shadow, and

29 See *TROTD*, pp. 115–6.

30 See, for example, *TROTD*, pp. 72; 226: 'I decided to minimize my presence by standing in the shadows'; 'I paused in the dimness of the corridor.'

even where there is predominantly shadow, semi-darkness, there must inevitably be some light. For Stevens, Lord Darlington is the proverbial sun around which his universe revolves, and he is content to exist merely in his shadow. He consciously constructs himself as part of the fiction he weaves around somebody else's life. The limelight, he believes, has to be reserved for greater men than himself. The tragedy for Stevens is that this attitude towards life keeps him not only physically in the shadows, but also in emotional and intellectual darkness. While he feels secure in the assumption that he is doing his duty, the reader soon realizes that Stevens's insistence on following orders is equal to a refusal to think for himself.

The most taxing situation in the relationship between employer and obedient servant occurs in the 1930s when Lord Darlington, by then firmly in the fangs of the British Blackshirts, orders Stevens to dismiss two Jewish housemaids. The history of British Appeasement in the 1930s has been well chronicled. The image of Prime Minister Chamberlain waving the Munich Agreement, on arrival back in Britain, has achieved notoriety. Appeasement as such, however, had its beginnings in different movements: a general pacifist movement following the horrors of the First World War, whose slogan was 'Never Again!', and which tried to avoid war at all costs; an economic movement; and a social development.[31]

Social appeasement often started in the drawing rooms of British country houses, among those aristocrats and gentry not involved directly in politics. Cannadine points out the disaffection felt by many aristocrats during the 1920s and 1930s which, in some cases, led to a dangerous political turn to the right. Landowners were aware of the decline around them. They realized that increasing taxation threatened their lifestyle, and they understood that their own political influence was decreasing in favour of lower-class men. The personal history of the leader of the British Union of Fascists, Sir Oswald Mosley, is characteristic of that: he was born into a landowning family which held estates in Staffordshire and Greater Manchester. Cannadine explains that

> [t]hey had been rebuffed by the citizens of Manchester in 1846, to whom they had grudgingly sold out their market rights … and thereafter they had retreated to their Rolleston estate, a self-contained feudal enclave, where they effectively pretended that the nineteenth century, *laissez-faire*, and the bourgeoisie did not exist. It was in this artificial world of carefully studied hierarchy, a closed and charmed circle of reciprocal rights and duties, free of class conflict or capitalistic exploitation, that the young Mosley was brought up. But in 1920, it vanished for ever, as the estate was sold, broken up, and given over to suburban development for Greater Manchester.[32]

As the aristocracy saw it, it was indeed a case of the Common Man infringing upon their ancient right. The experience of Mosley's family was shared by many

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31 See Keith Robbins, *Appeasement* Second Edition (Oxford, 1997), p. 6, which distinguishes between '"economic appeasement", "military appeasement", "political appeasement" and "social appeasement"'. See also Robbins, *Appeasement*, pp. 23 ff. for the development of the pacifist movement after the First World War.

32 David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, Revised Edition (London, 1996), pp. 547–8.

aristocrats – the family of his second wife Diana, the Mitfords, among them.[33] As Cannadine sums it up, 'Mosley's Fascism was deeply rooted in his own rootless experiences as a landed gentleman'.[34] Many among the aristocracy yearned for a strong leader to free Britain from crippling unemployment and lead her to renewed imperial strength. They looked to Germany and Italy, and to the Nazi and Fascist regimes for inspiration. In Lord Darlington's case, this orientation towards Germany was also fuelled by his worry that the Treaty of Versailles, in abusing a defeated enemy, had made him a traitor; it was also fuelled by his personal friendship with a German officer – 'He was a gentleman doing his job' (*TROTD*, p. 73) – who eventually commits suicide.[35] Churchill said that '[a]ppeasement … was good or bad according to circumstances'.[36] It usually developed out of 'fears, anxieties and misplaced optimism'.[37] Lord Darlington's initially liberal and humane feelings – fear for the well-being of a friend, anxiety for his own reputation – become increasingly clouded, and, eventually, fed by misplaced optimism in the wrong regime, turn openly anti-Semitic. Stevens recalls several 'entirely untypical incidents' (*TROTD*, p. 146) which shock him by their vehemence, because they do not conform to the idealistic picture that he has painted of Lord Darlington.[38] The climax comes when Stevens is instructed to dismiss two Jewish maids: '"I've been doing a great deal of thinking, Stevens. … And I've reached my conclusion. We cannot have Jews on the staff here at Darlington Hall"' (*TROTD*, p. 146).

Twenty years later, Stevens still tries to play down the 'incident', but also claims that he never agreed with his lordship on this point: 'My every instinct opposed the idea of their dismissal. Nevertheless, my *duty* in this instance was quite clear, and as I saw it, there was nothing to be gained at all in *irresponsibly displaying* such *personal doubts*. It was a difficult task, but as such, one that demanded to be carried out with *dignity*' (*TROTD*, p. 148; emphases mine). Stevens's weakness is evident. Yes, one could argue that a servant has to take orders. But everything has its limit – especially obedience and loyalty to an employer. This question has been debated for centuries. In *The Courtier*, for example, Castiglione's speakers heatedly debate questions of loyalty and duty to one's master:

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33 Of the six Mitford girls, four went to political extremes: Jessica and Nancy to the left, turning Communist and Socialist respectively, Diana and Unity to the right, the former becoming an admirer of Hitler, the latter a fervent Nazi. For more information, see Mary S. Lovell, *The Sisters: The Saga of the Mitford Family* (New York: 2002).

34 Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p. 549.

35 He repeatedly complains about the heavy duties that the Versailles treaty placed upon the defeated foe. See, for example, *TROTD*, pp. 71; 73; 76. Lord Darlington's comment that the treaty is a 'complete break with the traditions of this country' (*TROTD*, p. 71) echoes former British notions of treating a defeated enemy with respect.

36 Winston Churchill, quoted in Robbins, *Appeasement*, p. 32.

37 Robbins, *Appeasement*, p. 49.

38 Two other instances include His Lordship's belittling a 'Jewish propaganda sheet' (*TROTD*, p. 146), and his asking his butler to cease donations to a charity which is allegedly managed by a Jewish committee. See *TROTD*, p. 146.

> I woulde have you to clere me of one doubt that I have in my head, quoth then the L. Lodovicus Pius, namely, whether a gentleman be bound or no, while he is in his Princis service, to obey him in all thinges which he shal commaund, though they were dishonest and shameful matters.
>
> In dishoneste matters we are not bounde to obey any body, aunswered Syr Fridericke.
> And what (replyed the L. Lodovicus Pius) if I be in service with a Prince who handleth me well, and hopeth that I will do any thing for him that may be done, and he happen to commaunde me to kyll a man, or any other like matter, ought I to refuse to do it?
> You ought, answered Syr Fridericke, to obey your Lorde in all thinges that tende to his profit and honour, not in suche matters that tende to his losse and shame. Therefore yf he shoulde commaunde you to conspire treason, ye are not onely bounde to doe it, but ye are bounde not to doe it, bothe for your own sake and for being a minister of the shame of your Lorde.[39]

Sir Fridericke's answer is crucial: obey your lord if it enhances his honour, disobey if it endangers it. Stevens does not make this distinction. He should have pleaded with Lord Darlington on behalf of the maids. The dismissal of the Jewish girls irrevocably taints Lord Darlington's reputation as a gentleman. In adopting a firmer attitude against His Lordship, Stevens might have been in a position to rescue His Lordship's claim to gentlemanliness. At the same time, he could have proven his own superior moral worth. But he fears the consequences. If he were to question His Lordship once, would not his belief in Lord Darlington's greatness begin to falter? In an argument with Miss Kenton, he says that 'his lordship has made his decision and there is nothing for you and I to debate over' (*TROTD*, p. 148). This attitude can be seen again when young Mr. Cardinal tries to make Stevens take a stand against His Lordship's political activities: he feigns ignorance, and hides behind a statement he must have uttered a hundred times: 'it is not my place to be curious about such matters, sir' (*TROTD*, p. 222). In his boundless loyalty, Stevens is like the famous three monkeys who see, hear and speak no evil. His fate lies with His Lordship; if His Lordship decides to remain on a sinking ship, so, surely, must his faithful retainer.

It is Stevens's passive attitude which distinguishes him from other literary menservants. Sancho Panza would never leave Don Quijote in the lurch, but he would not support him in immoral deeds; Sam Weller would die for Mr. Pickwick, but would never hesitate to give him a piece of his mind. And Crichton is prepared to take over the leadership from Lord Loam altogether when away from England. In P.G. Wodehouse's *The Code of the Woosters* there is a scenario similar to Lord Darlington's Nazi sympathies, when Bertie gets involved with Sir Roderick Spode. In his depiction of Sir Roderick and his Black Shorts, Wodehouse mercilessly lampoons Mosley and his Blackshirts. Importantly, Jeeves rescues Bertie from the disaster which would inevitably have resulted from involvement with Sir Roderick. Stevens, allegedly so loyal to his master, does no such thing. He watches him run headlong into disaster.

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39 Count Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Thomas Hoby, ed. Virginia Cox (London, 1994), pp. 126–7.

Lord Darlington eventually repents, and voices regret about what has happened to the maids.[40] Stevens does not. Despite declaring that he had opposed the dismissal of the maids, he never once openly expresses regret at the part he himself played in it. He hides behind his duty. This is the same argument which had been used unsuccessfully by the defence during the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal. Following one's duty does not give one a *carte blanche* when it comes to crime.

It is crucial to see the difference between Lord Darlington and Stevens here. The faithful butler tries to remain loyal to his *image* of the admired master, despite the fact that Lord Darlington himself admits his errors. Stevens's way of dealing with the past is symptomatic of his general attitude of hiding from the facts. He repeatedly denies ever having worked for Lord Darlington, while simultaneously trying to defend him, regardless of the facts.[41] In a telling passage, he attempts to clear Lord Darlington from false accusations, which he dismisses as 'utter nonsense' (*TROTD*, p. 125); he also tries to reassure his readers – and, crucially, himself – that he is not embarrassed at having worked for him. But between the lines, it can be read that Stevens *is* ashamed of his own part in Lord Darlington's crimes. His own weakness, in failing to stand up to Lord Darlington, clouds the rest of his life, and seriously undermines his claim of being a truly great butler.

Most of the debate about 'the gentleman' in *The Remains of the Day* concerns Lord Darlington, who initially conforms to the stereotype of the aristocratic, slightly eccentric English gentleman: an influential and moral man, whose main concern is to improve a world which, for the second time in the century, is on the brink of war. Highly idealistic, and a veteran of the Great War, he befriends the defeated enemy, and fights for fair treatment of Germany after Versailles. His words 'once you've got a man on the canvas, that ought to be the end of it. You don't then proceed to kick him' (*TROTD*, p. 87) echo decades of public-school teaching, and the indoctrination of a nation obsessed with chivalry and fair-play. Lord Darlington's inexcusable error lies in applying these originally honourable notions in a one-sided manner: his philanthrophy *in*cludes the Nazis but *ex*cludes Jewish housemaids, and as such it cannot but be politicized. Although in all probability not an anti-Semite at heart, his gentlemanly notions of fair play make him an easy target for the ruthless Nazis, and he soon works for their cause instead of his own.

It is in the context of the 1923 appeasement conference that much of the debate about 'the gentleman' takes place. Most of the assembled delegates are men of Lord Darlington's stamp: similar background, same upbringing. To put it otherwise, they live according to traditional values, and are unaware of changes in society. The one true twentieth-century man in the assembly is the American congressman Lewis. He perceives the dangers of gentlemen meddling in world affairs, and loudly voices his concern when labelling them as amateurs. His full comments deserve inclusion here, because they again represent the contrast of twentieth-century natures:

> You gentlemen here, forgive me, but you are just a bunch of naïve dreamers. And if you didn't insist on meddling in large affairs that affect the globe, you would actually be

40 See *TROTD*, p. 151.

41 See, *TROTD*, pp. 120; 123.

> charming. Let's take our good host here. What is he? He is a gentleman. No one here, I trust, would care to disagree. A classic English gentleman. Decent, honest, well-meaning. But his lordship here is *an amateur*. ... He is an amateur and international affairs today are no longer for gentlemen amateurs. … All you decent, well-meaning gentlemen … have you any idea what sort of place the world is becoming all around you? The days when you could act out of your noble instincts are over. (*TROTD*, p. 102)

Congressman Lewis sums up the spirit of the time. He questions all the values that are important to his host. Lord Darlington, however, closes his eyes to the truth. He retaliates with 'what you describe as "amateurism," sir, is what I think most of us here still prefer to call "honour"' (*TROTD*, p. 103). In Lord Darlington's definition of the term, honour comprises the offer of a helping hand, even to a defeated foe. What Lord Darlington does not understand is that other people's conception of honour has undergone a reappraisal, whereas his own has remained static.

There is much ambiguity in this scene: the particular interest of the novel lies in the fact that Lord Darlington, though undoubtedly having had honourable intentions when he first started his campaign, grossly misapplies them, and fights for the wrong cause. Leaving the political implications aside for the moment, Lord Darlington and Congressman Lewis can be compared to Anthony Powell's Nick Jenkins and Kenneth Widmerpool. Like Nick, Lord Darlington represents the man of imagination: raised with old-fashioned notions of chivalry and fair play, he wants to live his life accordingly. Unlike Nick, though, Lord Darlington politicizes his ambitions, and sadly in a terribly misconceived way. His aim to make the world a better place backfires and leaves him a broken man. He has to understand that men like him are now easy prey for ruthless fanatics. Congressman Lewis, on the other hand, is the Widmerpool of the novel: modern, up-to-date, blunt and career-minded. He might find men like Lord Darlington charming, but considers them outmoded relics. His words during the final conference dinner echo those of Widmerpool who stated that, in the modern world, it is 'no good being too gentlemanly' (*SA*, p. 545).

In his characterization of Lord Darlington, Ishiguro highlights the danger of being a gentleman in the twentieth century: honourable notions can be misapplied; status and influence abused for the wrong ends. Harold Laski writes that 'the problem is not the virtues of the type [gentleman] so much as its adequacy for its function; … there is no field of activity in the modern world in which the amateur, however benevolent, can retain his function as leader without risking the survival of those who depend upon him. The gentleman's characteristics are a public danger in all matters where quantitative knowledge, unremitting effort, vivid imagination, organized planning are concerned'.[42] History has shown us unequivocally that the Nazis did not deserve a helping hand. The Jewish housemaids, however, depended on Lord Darlington, and needed his protection. In trying to make his gentlemanly notions of fair play work towards world peace, Lord Darlington sadly omits to give what small-scale help and protection is in his power.

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42 Harold J. Laski, *The Danger of Being a Gentleman and Other Essays* (London, 1939), p. 22.

In addition to the political depiction of the gentlemanly ideal above, there is another, more tongue-in-cheek presentation of it in the novel. It concerns Stevens, and his attempts at self-fashioning. '"You talk almost like a gentleman"' (*TROTD*, p. 119), he is told, which, with a wink and a smile, gives rise to the question of whether it is speech alone that makes the gentleman. Ishiguro here plays with simplified clichés of the gentleman as a purely class-related phenomenon: speakers of The Queen's English must be 'posh' and are consequently labelled, wrongly or rightly, as gentlemen. The question of clothing arises again. In his handed-down suits, borrowed vintage car and with his pompous manners, Stevens is immediately mistaken for an upper-class gentleman, the real thing, by the humble villagers of Moscombe.[43] '"It's a privilege to have a gentleman like yourself here in Moscombe, sir"' (*TROTD*, p. 183), they incessantly tell him, and so give an unexpected boost to his ego. During the course of ten pages of the narrative, the term gentleman is mentioned 22 times, which provides an ironic take on the villagers' overemphasis on preconceived notions of gentlemanliness. Ishiguro's ironic handling of this scene is well worth a closer look. Stevens by no means wishes to mislead the villagers; in fact he admits to a feeling of discomfort at being taken for a gentleman. Still, secretly he must be pleased that his lifelong effort at emulating what he perceives as real gentlemen has apparently rubbed off on him. Ishiguro's irony is twofold. On the one hand he ridicules the villagers' preoccupation with clichéd ideas of gentlemanliness, which makes them judge others by appearances only. On the other hand, he also highlights Stevens's shortcomings. He cannot take part in the free-spirited debate conducted by the villagers, especially when the village socialist begin to expand on the meaning of dignity. In his superiority, Stevens fails to see the innate truth in what Mr. Harry Smith tries to tell him: namely that '"Dignity is not just something for gentlemen"' (*TROTD*, p. 186).

At the end of his journey, Stevens witnesses the ceremonial switching on of the lights on Weymouth pier. The lights are metaphors for the truth about his life which is dawning on him. The dawning insight into the wasted efforts of his life brings unrestrained tears in front of strangers, when he fears that 'I've given what I've had to give. I gave it all to Lord Darlington' (*TROTD*, p. 243). The advice he gets from a sympathetic man proves invaluable: '"Don't keep looking back all the time, you're bound to get depressed ... you've got to keep looking forward"' (*TROTD*, p. 243). Stevens has to realize that, unlike Miss Sophie in *Dinner for One*, he cannot keep his eyes closed to the present and the future, and simply focus on the past. The errors have been committed years ago and cannot be undone. But they can teach him an invaluable lesson, and prepare him for what remains of his day.

The presentation of 'the gentleman' in Ishiguro's novel is ambiguous. The only born-and-bred aristocratic gentleman in the novel turns out to be no gentleman, on account of his badly judged political meddling. The butler who, because of his position in life, would consider it presumptous to call himself a gentleman, is taken as such by humble villagers on account merely of the cut of his suit and the

43 Interestingly enough, the village doctor, himself a gentleman, immediately recognizes Stevens for what he is: an upper-class servant.

eloquence of his speech. The villagers themselves seem permanently preoccupied with the trappings of gentlemanly values.

The message Ishiguro tries to convey in his novel is clear. In *The Remains of the Day*, he highlights the danger both of nostalgia and of misapplied conceptions of ideals, which are not adapting themselves to their time. He cunningly incorporates all three of Davis's forms of nostalgia, previously discussed. What Stevens displays in his narrative is pure and simple nostalgia. He yearns for the good old days, when he was the centre of activity in the house he considers his universe. This kind of nostalgia seems natural at the time of life that he writes his memoirs. Nawas and Platt explain that 'the concern of older people with the "good old days" is proverbial. Realizing that the future is coming to a close, the individual is prone to look back for ego comforts'.[44] This applies to Stevens, since his present is no longer fulfilling. He can no longer provide the level of service to which he is accustomed; the little errors he admits to must remind him of the errors which crept into his father's work just before his final illness. The future does not hold much promise, and, as he now has time to ponder, it is only natural that he should turn to a past when things appeared better.

Towards the end of the novel, Stevens's nostalgia becomes more reflexive. Davis explains that in reflexive nostalgia, 'the person does more than sentimentalize some past. … Was it really that way? … Am I forgetting the bad and unpleasant things that occurred?'[45] Stevens begins to understand that not all was better in the past; that His Lordship was not as infallible as he had hitherto believed, and that his own, unquestioning submission left him, at the end of his life, with a sour feeling of missed opportunities. He realizes that, given the chance to go back in time, he might do things differently. According to Davis, 'deriving from the nostalgic mood a parallel set of questions is sometimes … directed at the present. … Are things as bad as they seem? Looking back from some point in the future will I not feel as nostalgic for this period as I do now for that in the past?'[46] The fact that Stevens has dedicated his life to his duty gives him strength in his hour of misery: although he recognizes that he has wasted himself in his unquestioning loyalty, he knows that the present is not hopeless; that he can go back to service in the safe knowledge of having made mistakes in the past which he *might* be able to avoid in the future.

Underlying these two forms of nostalgia is the third, interpreted one, coming from the author himself. In picturing a protagonist who wallows in fond memories of a glorious past, but who slowly comes to realize that this past was not all he had believed it to be, the author analyses the very cause of nostalgia. He is presenting his readers with serious questions: why is Stevens nostalgic? Why is it significant? What does Stevens try to do – or rather avoid to do – by living in the past? The crucial question is reserved for the readers themselves: what can we as readers learn from Stevens's nostalgia? Ishiguro explains that 'with *The Remains of the Day* it's

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44 M. Mike Nawas and Jerome J. Platt, 'A Future-Oriented Theory of Nostalgia', *Journal of Individual Psychology* 21 (1965): 55.

45 Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesteryear: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York, 1979), p. 21.

46 Davis, *Yearning for Yesteryear*, p. 21.

like a pastiche where I've tried to create a mythical England'.[47] His strategy in *The Remains* was to have 'deliberately created a world which at first resembles that of those writers such as P.G. Wodehouse. I then start to undermine this myth and use it in a slightly twisted and different way'.[48] The twist lies in the fact that he presents his readers with a novel about traditional themes with an allegorical, mythical and metaphorical reach. It tries to depict one person's idea of Arcadia – but shows that this Arcadia was, in fact, only a myth, tainted by the infiltration of fanaticism and misapplied loyalties.

47 Vorda, 'Stuck on the Margins', pp. 13–4.
48 Vorda, 'Stuck on the Margins', p. 15.

PART III
The End of the Line?

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Chapter 8

Regression and Reaction: Past Realities and Future Possibilities

The gentleman as a survivor during and after the Great War; the gentleman in a battle of imagination against will; the gentleman as relic of chivalry, as dedicated landlord, hapless puppet on the strings of influential friends; the gentleman seriously repressed by his own ideals. These are just a few presentations of the gentleman in twentieth-century literature; there are many more. There is, for example, the gentleman cad, a particularly popular literary figure in the nineteenth century – one need think only of George Osborne in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, or Sir Felix Carbury in Trollope's *The Way We Live Now*. In twentieth-century literature, the cad no longer plays a prominent part, although one example might be Galsworthy's Soames Forsyte, a man not merely careless about the feelings of others, but deliberately callous. Then there is the unworldly gentleman, immortalized in P.G. Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster. Another popular presentation is that of the gentleman as the predominantly sentimental man: Ford's Edward Ashburnham in *The Good Soldier*, who had 'all the virtues that are usually accounted English' qualifies for that category.[1] In fact, Ashburnham is presented as the story-book gentleman: good-looking, polite, well-educated, a good soldier, loyal to his men, a well-loved landlord. His downfall is his sentimentality, his urge to help everyone around him, but mainly his uncontrollable tendency to give in to every emotion concerning women. Galsworthy's Miles Ruding, 'The Man Who Kept His Form', is another epitome of the literary gentleman: 'You're keeping up the prestige of the English gentleman', he is told.[2] To play the game, and to play it fair are the maxims of his life, and that despite the fact that life treats him roughly.

In 1969, John Fowles erected a postmodern memorial to the gentleman in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Although the main theme in Fowles's novel is that of female emancipation, he uses the image of the gentleman to highlight the shortcomings of patriarchal Victorian society. The novel's three different endings enhance this. The protagonist, Charles Smithson, is a carefully constructed Victorian gentleman: a baronet's grandson, an ex-public-school boy and a Cambridge man, wealthy, with good prospects, engaged to the delightful Ernestina. When he encounters the enigmatic Sarah Woodruff, his world falls apart. Charles's infatuation with Sarah endangers his status as a gentleman in various ways, among them the class connotations which would have been obvious in Victorian times; Charles is depicted as being 'embarrassedly conscious of being a gentleman about to call on

1 Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier* (London, 1946), p. 140.

2 John Galsworthy, 'The Man Who Kept His Form', in *Works, 30 Volumes*, Vol. 14 (London, 1923), p. 452.

a superior form of servant' (*TFLW*, p. 377). The first proposed ending is in keeping with Victorian morals. Charles exercises gentlemanly reticence, does not give in to his passion for Sarah, and returns to his fiancée, determined to forget Sarah – although dissatisfaction niggles at him. He realizes that in this decision he has merely conformed to society's expectations of him as a gentleman.

The second and third endings depart from classic Victorian morality and, at the same time, highlight its shortcomings. Charles's passions get the better of him, but with consummation comes remorse, which he wants to remedy by proposing marriage. The remorse is for his own behaviour, which Charles recognizes not to have been in line with that of a gentleman. He has uncritically believed the gossip that Sarah is a 'fallen woman', and the consummation of his passion for her is equal to rape. It is the recognition of her literal innocence which brings home to him the caddishness of his own behaviour. Despite Sarah's rejection of his proposal, Charles breaks his engagement with Tina, and is forced by her father's solicitors to sign a document which states, in black and white, that 'my *conduct* throughout this matter has been *dishonourable*, and by it I have for ever forfeited the right to be considered a *gentleman*' (*TFLW*, pp. 354–5, emphases mine). His reaction to that document is to declare 'I am defiled to the end of my life', and 'I wish I was dead' (*TFLW*, p. 356). Although the second ending initially departs from traditional expectations, it reverts to them by the renunciation of Charles's gentlemanly status – a reaction which would have been considered adequate in Victorian Britain. However, Fowles highlights the hypocrisy of Victorian society: Charles loses his status as gentleman, not for raping an innocent woman, but for breaking his engagement with a spoilt girl.

The third ending is the most convincing for a modern readership. Charles finds Sarah, but they quarrel. He feels like 'the last honourable man on the way to the scaffold' (*TFLW*, p. 397): male Victorian values of morals and duty are rejected by a woman modern before her time.

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles plays with perceptions of gentlemanliness over two centuries: he presents us first with a gentleman who places his gentlemanly values above personal happiness; secondly, with a gentleman who gives in to passion followed by remorse; and finally with a gentleman whose one moral lapse leads to a lifetime of recriminations. Fowles's message in this novel is that the gentleman is being pushed to the brink of extinction by the new strong woman. Charles Smithson needs to adapt himself to changing times, or else turn into one of the fossils which he himself collects.

In 1988, yet another version of the literary gentleman emerged, when Alan Hollinghurst took it into gay literature. Young, aristocratic William Beckwith, the protagonist of *The Swimming Pool Library*, has all the trappings of a gentleman of leisure who belongs 'to that tiny proportion of the populace that indeed owns almost everything' (*TSPL*, p. 3). He enjoys the good life and has some literary inclinations, but knows he does not have to rely on them for his living. Most of his time is spent at his club – but in a departure from previous literature of the gentleman, The Corinthian is not a St. James's gentlemen's club, but a sports club where Beckwith goes to work out and to pick up men. His friendship with the ageing Lord Nantwich forces him to relive the history of homosexuality in England. At the same time,

perusing Nantwich's journals and diaries leads him to discover a world of society parties reminiscent of Waugh's early novels.

In *The Swimming Pool Library*, Hollinghurst works through the history of homoeroticism and homoerotic writing in England. In the first instance, the novel frequently refers to acknowledged icons of homoerotic writing such as Wilde, Firbank and Forster. Bristow explains that 'Hollinghurst's … novel pays … tribute to a queer tradition whose literary achievements have frequently been disavowed as a central component of an England that could not bear to see the homosexuality of some of the nation's greatest …'.[3] Hints at the history of homosexuality in Britain can be found in Hollinghurst's cunningly chosen names: the protagonist's name Beckwith echoes that of William Beckford, one of the earliest practitioners of homoerotic writing; the name of Lord Nantwich's friend Sandy Labouchere recalls the Labouchere Amendment of 1885; Will's lover works in the Queensberry Hotel, named after the infamous Wilde trial. But the most crucial link between homoerotic and gentlemanly writing in Hollinghurst's novel can be seen in the renewed juxtaposition of the effeminate artist figure of Beckwith with those of his aggressively masculine lovers.

A more recent literary proof of the longevity of the gentlemanly ideal was William Boyd's *Any Human Heart*, published in 2002. It is written in the form of a journal, and follows the protagonist Logan Mountstuart through his public-school days, his time at Oxford, and on to the stations of his life: London, the Second World War, the post-war era, New York, Africa and France. Mountstuart's life shows a remarkable similarity to that of Waugh and even more to that of Powell, and both authors feature in Boyd's novel.[4] *Any Human Heart* is similar to *A Dance to the Music of Time* in that it covers several decades of British social life, and its protagonist, literary-minded Logan Mountstuart, like Nick Jenkins, chronicles his life and that of a small set of close friends, two of them made during his schooldays.

Any Human Heart, the final contribution to this debate on literary presentations of the gentleman in twentieth-century literature, is an important one, modelled as it is not only on *A Dance to the Music of Time* but also on many other gentleman-novels of the century. It is carefully constructed around pre-existing notions of gentlemanly lifestyles, and is heavily dependent for its inspiration on the lives of real writers and society men. The novel has been conceived in the recognized form of the literary journal, of the kind, for example, kept by both Waugh and Powell. In fact, Mountstuart's fictional journals create a new dimension to both Waugh's and Powell's journals and memoirs, which shows the author's fascination with and his

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3 Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885* (Buckingham, 1995), 13.

4 Alongside a plethora of other literary names, such as Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and others, Boyd's mention of Powell is particularly interesting in that it is closely based on Powell's own memoirs. So Powell, is, for example, depicted as 'a man called Powell, another historian. … His tutor was Kenneth Bell' (*AHH*, p. 90); 'drinks with Powell and his friend Henry Yorke at their lodgings in King Edward Street' (*AHH*, p. 91); and 'luncheon at L'Étoile with Roderick and Tony Powell – who is working at Duckworth's' (*AHH*, p. 130). Powell did indeed study history under Bell, share lodgings with Henry Yorke in King Edward Street and work at Duckworth's (see Anthony Powell, *To Keep the Ball Rolling: The Memoirs of Anthony Powell* [London, 1983], pp. 80–3; 105, 118).

endorsement of those two authors, their time, and, most importantly, their lifestyles. As such, *Any Human Heart* is a celebration of the figure of the gentleman as a writer, and the gentleman as a literary trope.[5]

The trope of the gentleman still inspires writers' and readers' imaginations alike, and, as such, the idea of the gentleman is still a part of British cultural life. If one looks outside literature, one can, for example, see the continued importance of the image of the gentleman in international fashion. A clear example of that is provided by current trends in advertising: Barbour and Burberry are just two of the big brand names which invest large amounts of money in campaigns which depict the English (country) gentleman suitably attired for all occasions and weathers. In London, traditional tailoring shops in Saville Row flourish – there is still a large market for men who aim at least to *look* like English gentlemen. Traditional gentlemen's clubs are still popular with politicians, businessmen, writers and men of leisure seeking the sanctuary of a club's library to escape the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

But fashion is of further importance: the ideal of the gentleman has survived different twentieth-century literary trends because it has proven itself to be adaptable. As an ideal, it is still very much alive, able to change and to adapt itself to new trends. It is, literally, a question of dressing up an old-fashioned ideal to make it appeal to yet another generation. One example of this is the so-called 'Merchant-Ivory-Syndrome'.[6] It highlights the fascination of, in particular, Americans with English upper-class life, country houses, and recollections of life in them from the perspectives of both upstairs and downstairs, and is reflected in the boxoffice success of films such as *Howard's End* or *The Remains of the Day*. The year 2002, for example, saw the release of Robert Altman's acclaimed *Gosford Park*, a film which ingeniously combines perspectives of both masters and servants in an Edwardian country house. Channel Four catered to this public taste in its recent 'reality' series *The Edwardian Country House*, a re-enactment, with live-in volunteers, of life upstairs and downstairs in an Edwardian country house, and in the accompanying *Treats from the Edwardian Country House*. These followed the success of the earlier programme on the Victorian house and family. These programmes, and their ratings in particular, show that there is considerable interest among the viewing public in recreating past times.

There are also the ever-popular Bond films. Ian Fleming, the author of the Bond books, clearly created his master spy as an English gentleman. David explains that 'Fleming specifically set out to make Bond such a paragon' and elaborates that:

> though they have long-since found enduring success in the pulp paperback market … the Bond novels were originally written for a sophisticated readership. … Thus Bond smokes "a Balkan and Turkish mixture made for him by Morlands of Grosvenor Street," lives in a Chelsea flat, drives "one of the last 4½-litre Bentleys with the supercharger by Amherst

5 In October 2003, William Boyd published an article in defence of Evelyn Waugh. William Boyd, 'Behind the Pose', *The Saturday Telegraph* (4 October 2003): books 1–2.

6 For a discussion of the term, see Susie O'Brien, 'Serving a New World Order: Postcolonial Politics in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*', *Modern Fiction Studies* 42/4 (1996): 787–806

> Villiers," wears Sea Island cotton shirts, snorkels in a Pirelli mask, dines at Blade's and kills with a .25 Beretta. Every mention of a brand name or real place is part of a conscious attempt to create a real … world in which the novels' target readers could immediately feel at home.[7]

Fleming was incidentally yet another member of the group of writers surrounding Powell and, especially, Waugh. The continued appeal of the Bond films – and the depiction of Bond as a quintessential gentleman – can be explained by the fact that Bond has moved with the times. He is the first to embrace new trends, but, at the same time, he never loses sight of his motto 'For Queen and Country': he is loyal and reliable in the performance of his duty, but manages to portray it as 'hip'.

As a final example of the dressing-up of old values, one might even argue that the enormously successful Harry Potter books are nothing but an adaptation of Thomas Hughes's public-school novel *Tom Brown's Schooldays* for a young twenty-first-century audience which needs to reconsider traditional moral values, such as honesty, steadfastness, loyalty and commitment to a chosen duty. These are precisely the values that Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry teaches its young witches and wizards – but the added magic makes them more attractive to a modern readership craving ever-new stimulations.[8]

Let us conclude with one final example drawn from popular-culture, which highlights the British public's awareness of the gentlemanly ideal. During a screening of ITV's highly successful show *Pop Idol* in 2002, one of the young contestants rejected the aggressive comments of one of the judges, and politely criticized his behaviour during earlier shows. The judge, impressed, replied with 'You are a gentleman, sir'. There was no need for him to say more. His meaning was clear: the contestant had been calm and courteous even in his criticism of the judge, not only well-founded, but eloquent, and delivered without once descending into mere insult. The contestant eventually went on to win the show. His victory and continued success show that Gentleman Will commanded people's respect, and that there is still a preference for role-models, rather than mere short-lived teen idols.

W.G. Sebald pondered that 'now there was nothing anymore, nobody, no stationmaster in gleaming peaked cap, no servants, no coachman, no house guests, no shooting parties, neither gentlemen in indestructible tweeds nor ladies in stylish travelling clothes. It takes just one awful second, I often think, and an entire epoch passes'.[9] What this book has tried to show is that the image of the English gentleman did not disappear in 'just one awful second', but that it has survived into the twenty-first century. It has done so in many definitions and manifestations, influenced not only by popular trends of the time, but also by novels and historical events, and sometimes reacting against them. Siegfried Sassoon depicted a gentlemanliness steeped in

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7 Hugh David, *Heroes, Mavericks and Bounders: The English Gentleman from Lord Curzon to James Bond* (London, 1991), pp. 239–40.

8 See, for example, J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (London, 1997). On first arrival at Hogwarts, Harry, like Tom Brown before him, has to fight for his place in the pecking order of the school. He finally takes on the school bully Malfoy, a modern-day adaptation of Hughes' Flashman.

9 W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, transl. Michael Hulse (London, 1999), p. 31.

pastoralism and Englishness, tainted but not entirely defeated by the ugliness of the First World War. Anthony Powell presented his readers with a traditional gentleman of letters, an artist struggling to survive against the onslaught of philistine modern man. Evelyn Waugh adopted a similar idea, but exaggerated it, while closing his eyes to progress, and regressing into a mythologized past. Both these authors and their lifestyles are celebrated in William Boyd's novel. John Fowles showed the hypocrisy of the nineteenth-century gentlemanly ideal, and Alan Hollinghurst highlighted the connection between gentlemanliness and homoeroticism. Finally, Kazuo Ishiguro created a protagonist who tries to emulate a gentlemanly ideal by unthinkingly copying an admired master *un*worthy of the admiration.

The authors discussed in this book were influenced by the social, cultural and political events taking place around them. Their literary gentlemen respond to or, as the case may be, react against those changes. This highlights the increasing *subjectivization* of twentieth-century literary depictions of the gentleman, a reflection of their authors' attempts to grapple with a rapidly changing world. They might depict an ideal which is no longer what it once used to be, or what it is often popularly conceived to be, but they show that it remains active as a potent literary idea.

The ideal of the gentleman has now been a literary presence for several centuries. In an over-stylized form, such as that depicted in Waugh's later novels, for example, it runs the danger of being mythologized. But the other novels confirm the adaptability of the ideal to modern times, and it is this adaptability which should ensure its survival.

In his book *Albion*, Peter Ackroyd deals with what he terms the 'English imagination'.[10] He lists things and events which have, in his opinion, shaped and inspired a typically English imagination: trees, for example; country gardens; religion; music; and many more. The 'English gentleman' ought to be on that list. Whether we call it ideal or myth, the image of the gentleman has, over centuries, inspired the English imagination, and still does so to this very day. It has proven to be an ideal adaptable to the requirements of its day, which has survived *because of* its adaptability. As such, it has not only *fashioned* men throughout the decades but has itself proven to be – in both meanings of the word – a *fashionable* ideal.

10 See Peter Ackroyd, *Albion. The Origins of the English Imagination* (London, 2002)

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Index